

Geography & Topography

# A Pilgrimage to the Saga-Steads of Iceland. [With illustrations.]



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W. G. Collingwood, Jo?n Ph.D. Stefa?nsson







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Collingwood, W. G.  
Jón Ph.D. Stefánsson  
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A PILGRIMAGE  
TO THE  
SAGA-STEADS  
OF  
ICELAND.













THE "LÖGBERG" AND THINGVALLA-WATER.

A PILGRIMAGE TO THE  
SAGA-STEADS  
OF  
ICELAND

BY

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ULVERSTON :

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## PREFACE.

THIS is a picture book to illustrate the sagas of Iceland. It is intended to supply the background of scenery which the ancient dramatic style takes for granted. The old saga-teller's audience knew the country, and needed no landscape description, except here and there a word to fix the weather or time of year; or in some romantic adventures, like those of Grettir, to conjure up the mysterious giant's dale or the demon's awful chasm.

And so the modern reader, out of Iceland, is left wholly at a loss when he tries to *stage* these dramas, to *visualize* the action and events. Their human interest and artistic power he acknowledges, but when he tries to imagine the surroundings of the figures all is blank; and he has little help from travellers' tales of pony-riding and picnic-making at the Geysir or Hekla or the sulphur mines,—none of which are so much as named in the stories of old. If he fancies Gunnár's "blake acres" and Snorri's Holy Fell, the spots where Gudrún dwelt and Kjartan died, as a howling wilderness of frost and fire, how impossible the whole thing becomes. Tenderness and passion of a sort may be found wherever human life can be lived; but the intense tenderness and the intense passion of the sagas could only be developed among scenery which, whether the actors felt it or not, reacted upon their sentiment.

It was in this belief that we undertook our pilgrimage. We went out to see the very places where events so familiar in books occurred in reality; and we found that the belief was true. For every touch of human interest in the sagas—pastoral, romantic or sublime—there was, and still remains, a landscape setting no less sweet, or strange, or stern.

The illustrations now presented are from our sketches made on the spot, and exhibited in London for the Norwegian Club at the Hall of Clifford's Inn, March and April 1898; and at the Alpine Club, March 1899. Good large photographs might have been more convincing; but there are difficulties in the way of carrying breakable apparatus on ponyback over a thousand miles of rough and roadless country, unpacking at short notice in wind or wet, waiting for light, hunting for foregrounds, and the other inconveniences of a long and often hurried journey of three months by land and sea. We carried a Kodak and used it freely for figures and picturesque bits; but on most occasions found that the particular view we wanted was more easily and satisfactorily sketched than photographed. And as our object was to make portraits of the places and not picturesque compositions, they may be taken as fairly accurate,—all the more because our work was often watched by people of the place—old and young—who checked off every touch as it was laid; and there is nothing that puts a sketcher so much on his guard against playing tricks with the facts.

While one of us drew, the other made notes, identifying sites, measuring and describing remains, with the local saga always in hand, together with Kalund's standard work on the topography of Iceland, and the publications of the Icelandic Antiquarian Society. As an Icelander not unknown in his native country he found friends and helpers everywhere, ready to give guidance and information about all the ancient folk-lore and traditions in which the place abounds. It is rare in Iceland to meet man, woman or child ignorant of the historic interest of their homes; and they are proverbially hospitable; but a stranger, even though he knew something of the language, could hardly expect to find such advantages, or to be able to make so much use of them.

To the good friends who helped us with advice, encouragement and information,—to the kind folk all over Iceland who received so heartily this pair of unannounced and unaccredited wanderers, turning out at nights for us, guiding us in daylong rides, giving us always of their best, and that freely,—we have offered sincere thanks, and still owe heartfelt gratitude. If we do not mention each by name it is because the hospitality we received was unvarying. We can repay it only by commending them and theirs to all who love romantic scenery enriched with noble memories.

## NOTE.

In writing Icelandic names for the English reader, the usual rule is to omit the nominative endings. This we have carried out where possible. We have made the Icelandic aspirates into *d*, except in one or two cases where corresponding endings are found in English, in order to make the book readable, as an English book. It is for the same reason that *Eyjafell* is sometimes used for *Eyjafjallajökul*, *Lyth End* for *Hlíðarendi*, etc.

We have tried to eliminate all debatable matter. We have, however, assumed that tradition is right in ascribing the Runic gravestone at Borg to *Kjartan*, though his name does not appear in the part of the inscription one can read with certainty.

A sketch of the old "*lögretta*" by *Arne Magnusson* arrived too late for insertion. In it, the seat of each law-court-man is marked by a stone in the round turf bench on which they sat.

And we should like to record our thanks to our printer and publisher for much patience and kindness with text and plates, which we trust will do credit to his enterprise and resources.

*Easter, 1899.*



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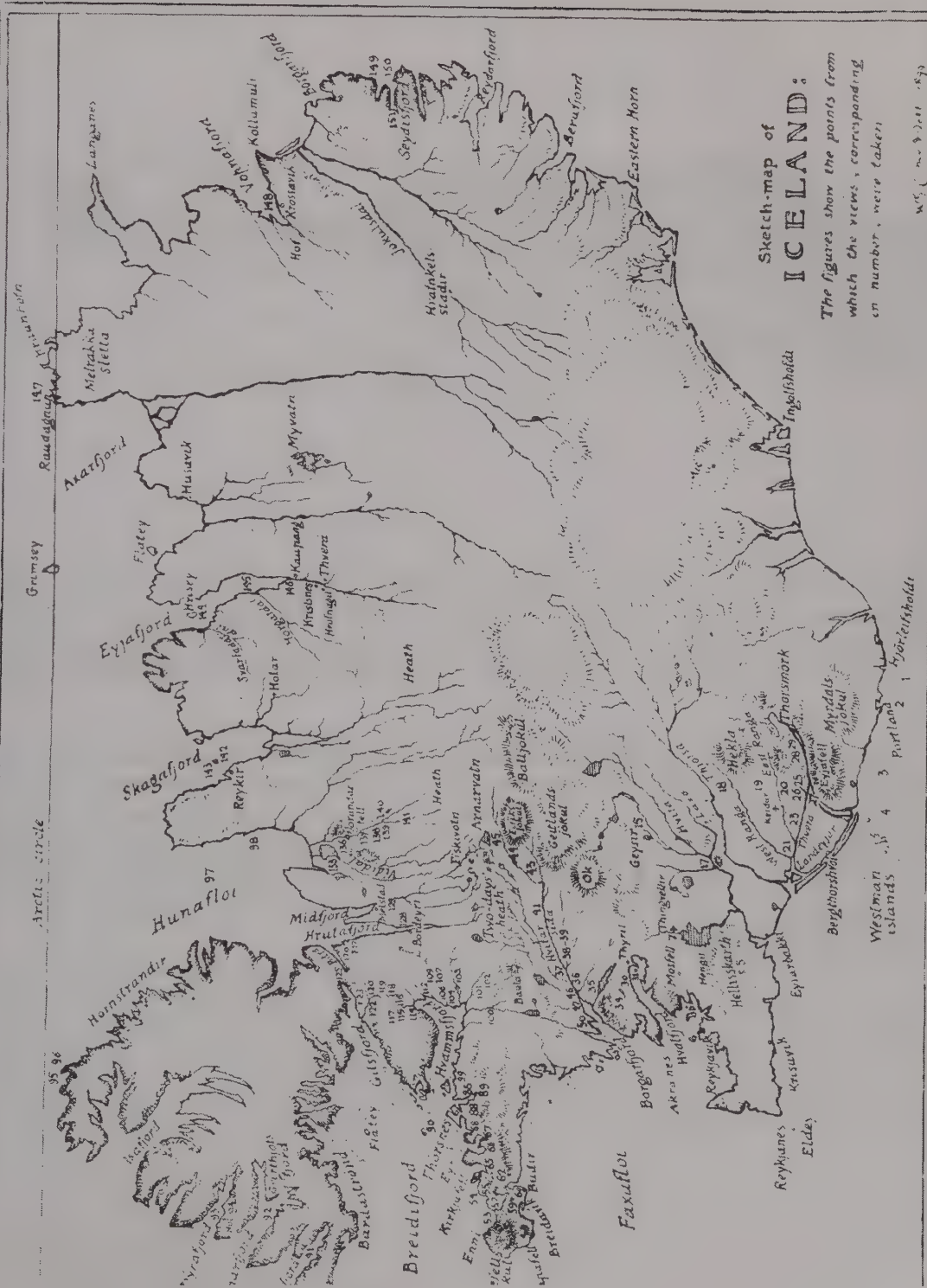
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# Sketch-map of ICELAND:

The figures show the points from  
which the views, corresponding  
in number, were taken

W. G. M. S. 1893

# I. TO THINGVELLIR AND GEYSIR;

## THE REGULAR TOURIST ROUND.

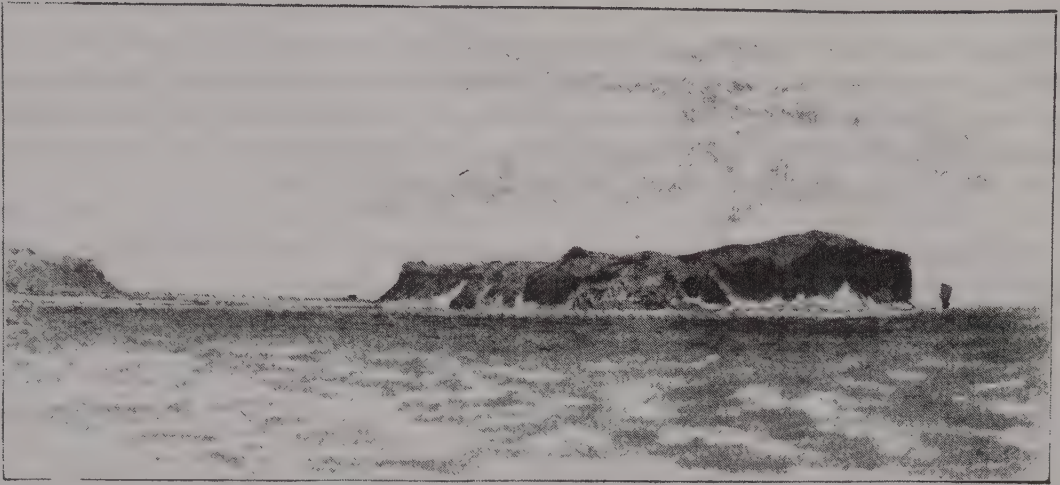
In these notes to our pictures we make no attempt to describe modern Iceland, nor our travels therein. Modern Iceland, to be truly and thoroughly described, needs quite a different kind of treatment from any we could give in notes upon pictures; and our travels, though not unattended with their pains and pleasures, were hardly exciting enough to make a book about.

It so happened that we began our pilgrimage at Stykkishólm, and worked through Snæfells-nes first; then round the Dales to the north, and back over Grímsstungu-heidi to Borg and Reykjavík: afterwards making a circular tour in the south, and finishing with the circumnavigation of the west, north and east. But as nearly every traveller approaches Iceland by the same route, and visits Thingvellir and Geysir if nothing else, it seems natural, in rearranging our notes and sketches, to begin with the south coast and make at once for the celebrated Thingvellir.

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1. HJÖRLEIF'S-HEAD.

After sighting the distant snowy domes that rise upon the sea-line, just as, a thousand years ago, they loomed into sight for the first Viking adventurer, and gave the name of Iceland to the unvisited realm; after the horizon has settled down beneath the snow-level, and the misty gleams resolve themselves into landward shapes and shadows, the first bit of shore that the voyager makes out is Hjörleif's-head. The effect of the moment is subtly given in Morris's "Iceland First Seen":—

"Lo from our loitering ship a new land at last to be seen;  
Toothed rocks down the side of the firth, on the east guard a weary wide lea,  
And black slope the hill-sides above striped adown with their desolate green;  
And a peak rises up on the west from the meeting of cloud and of sea,  
Foursquare from base unto point like the building of Gods that have been,  
The last of that waste of the mountains all cloud-wreathed and snow-flecked and grey,  
And bright with the dawn that began just now at the ending of day."

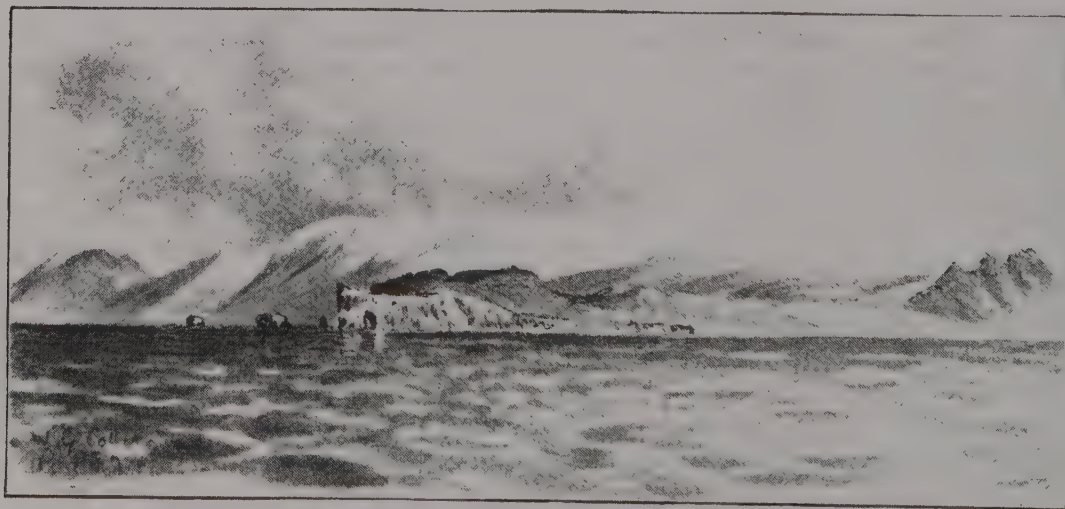
On this rocky peninsula landed the foster-brother of Ingólf the first settler, after winning his name of Hjör-leif (Leif of the Sword) from an adventure in Ireland where he penetrated some mysterious underground crypt or "earth house,"\* fought in the dark with an unseen foe and took his sword and treasure. After the first winter spent on this headland Hjörleif's Irish thralls, Dufthak (Dubhthach, a common Irish name, "the black one") and Drafdrit (*Dreuch-treithe*, "haggard face") and the rest, laid a plot against him and slew him. Ingólf's people, that spring, were searching the shore for his high-seat pillars,—the carved posts of a

\*Such as Sir W. R. Wilde discovered, and described in his book on "Lough Corrib" (1867). Similar constructions in Scotland are described by Dr. Joseph Anderson in "Scotland in Pagan Times: Iron Age," Lecture VI.

Norse chief's arm chair, or settle,—which, according to common use and wont, he had thrown overboard to drift ashore and lead the way to the home appointed him by fate. They came upon Hjörleif's dead body, and joined in the chase of the murderers, who were found upon certain islands hard by, and slain there to a man. The Norse called all British folk, and especially the people of Ireland, "West-men"; so these Islands have ever since been called the Westman Islands; Vestmanna-eyjar in Icelandic.

"Doorhill-island" is the next great promontory, and the southernmost point of Iceland. From the passing steamer the tunnelled rock is easily visible; foreign sailors, translating the name, call it Portland. Above it rises the long white line of Myrdals-jökul, the "snow-mountain of Mire-dale."

This name *jökul*,—say the English "yokel" and it is near enough for a tourist's pronunciation; Icelandic *j* is like German *j*, like *y* in *yes*:—the word *jökul* originally means any piece of ice, great or small. We have it in English *ic-icle*, from Anglo-Saxon *is-gicel*; or more nearly in the North English *ice-shockle*, obviously a survival of the very word, introduced by the Viking ancestors of North Country dalesmen. It is often translated "glacier," but incorrectly; it really stands for the whole mass of snow, *névé*, and glacier which covers a mountain; not merely for the moving ice-tongue, *skrid-jökul*, "scree-ice," descending into a valley from the limit of perpetual snow.



2. DYR-HOLA-EY AND MYRDALS-JÖKUL.



A little farther, and we come abreast of this great snow-top with its long tongue of "scree-shockle" or true glacier creeping among huge moraines towards the shore. The valley beneath, which gives name to the mountain, is called Mýrdal (Mire-dale) where lies the homestead of Sól-heimar (Sun-home, as we call a house Sunnybank or Sunnyside). The settlement was originally founded by Lodmund the Old, a mighty warlock, says the Landnámabók in its description of the settlers and their estates. Near Lodmund lived another wizard named Thrasi. Once upon a time Thrasi looked out in the morning and saw a great "water-leap," a torrent from the glacier then suddenly melting, by reason of some sub-glacial eruption, it may be, as indeed happened on this coast not many months before our visit. Thrasi set his wizardry to work and diverted the flood eastward against Sólheimar. A servant of Lodmund's beheld it, and ran home, shouting that the sea was coming out of the land upon them from the north. Now Lodmund was blind by that time; but he told the servant to fetch him in a bucket what he called "sea." "That is no sea," said Lodmund, and bade the man follow him to the edge of the flood. "Stick the point of my staff in the water," he said,—and then grasped the staff with both hands, and bit on the ring, and did warlock's tricks, so that the water took to falling westward toward Skógar (Shaws, or Woods) where Thrasi lived. He thereupon by art magic turned it back again; but this time it met with a ravine into which it settled, and thence ran to the sea in a river which is now called the Glacier river, Jökuls-á on Sólheima-sand.

Westward, in continuation of the range, is Eyja-fjalla-jökul, where the snow-caps rise to a peak, standing nobly above the inhabited shelf of foreshore. Round its shoulder from the valley behind it flows the Markar-fljót, called Mark-fleet in Dasent's "Burnt Njal," more strictly Forest-flood: for the valley at the back of Eyjafell was once thickly wooded and known as the Mörk; even now, in its less accessible dells, wood grows freely and to a considerable size. Markar-fljót is not merely a great river, but a huge and terrible "flood," swollen at times by rain and melting snow. Not content with a single channel to the sea, it spreads out in the manner of the Nile at its Delta, enclosing tracts of flat grass-country called the Land-eyjar (Land-Isles) as being surrounded with water and yet parts of the land. The "fell," as we say in the North of England, overlooking these islands is naturally Eyja-fell,—and the snow-cap and glaciers of this range of fells are described as Eyja-fjalla-jökul. To this we must return from the landward side: but its fine mass, as viewed from the sea, gives promise already of picturesque character in "the land we came forth for to see."

And "there 'mid the grey grassy dales  
sore scarred by the ruining streams  
Lives the tale of the Northland of old  
and the undying glory of dreams."





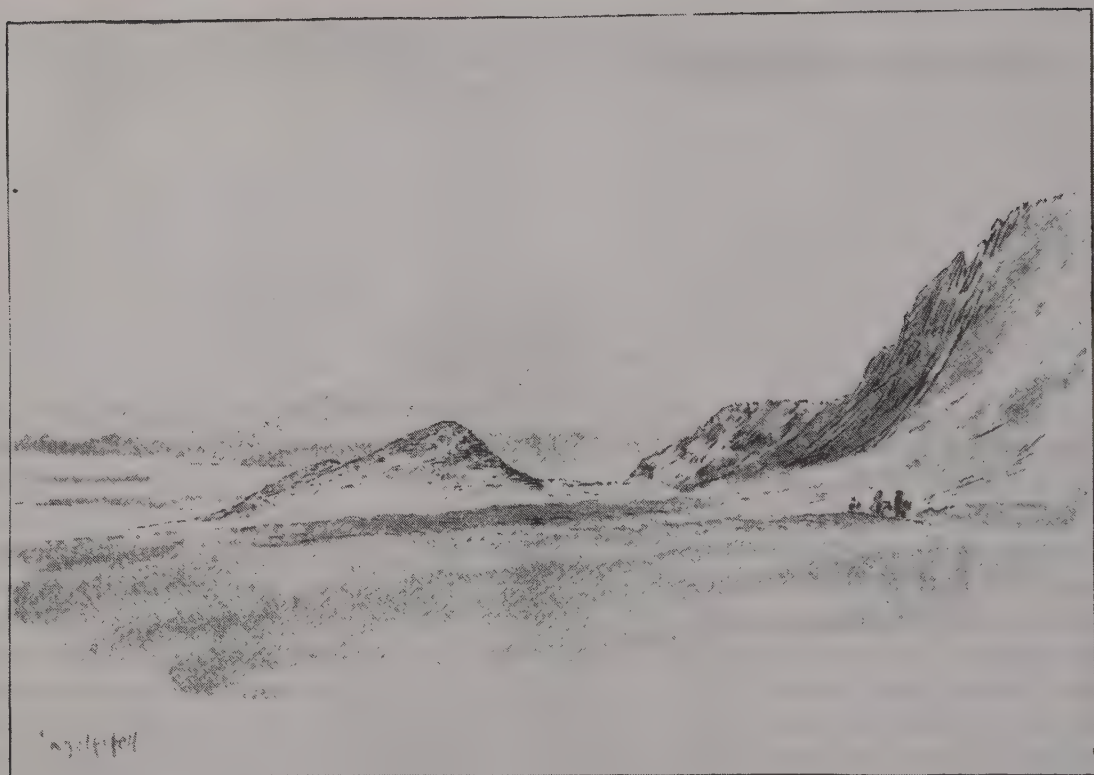
3. EYJA-FELL.



#### 4. WESTMAN ISLANDS.

Off the Land-eyjar, at no great distance on the map, but isolated by a stormy sea and long lines of breakers on a harbourless coast, the crags of the Westman islands rise abruptly from the water line: fantastic pinnacles swarming with the fulmar and other sea-fowl, and sheltering behind their rock-walls the humble homesteads which have so tragic a history. The fate of the original Irish in the 9th century we have already heard. Their story had a sequel in the 17th, even more terrible. About the middle of July 1627, three Algerine pirate ships appeared suddenly off the coast, and their crews, guided by a man they had captured on board a Danish schooner, effected a landing. They seized the defenceless inhabitants, and tortured many to death. They hunted all the caves and crannies of the islands for people in hiding, and some whom they could not reach, to lay hands on, they shot at like wild birds, until they dropped. Then they marched all their captives together, and selected 242 able-bodied men and women to be taken to Algiers as slaves; the weak and wounded that remained were shut up in a house and burnt to death. Among the victims was the clergyman of the islands, Jón Thorsteinsson, who, strangely enough, had foretold his death the year before. It hardly relieves the gloom of the story to hear that a handful of the captives were ultimately ransomed by the Danish Government.

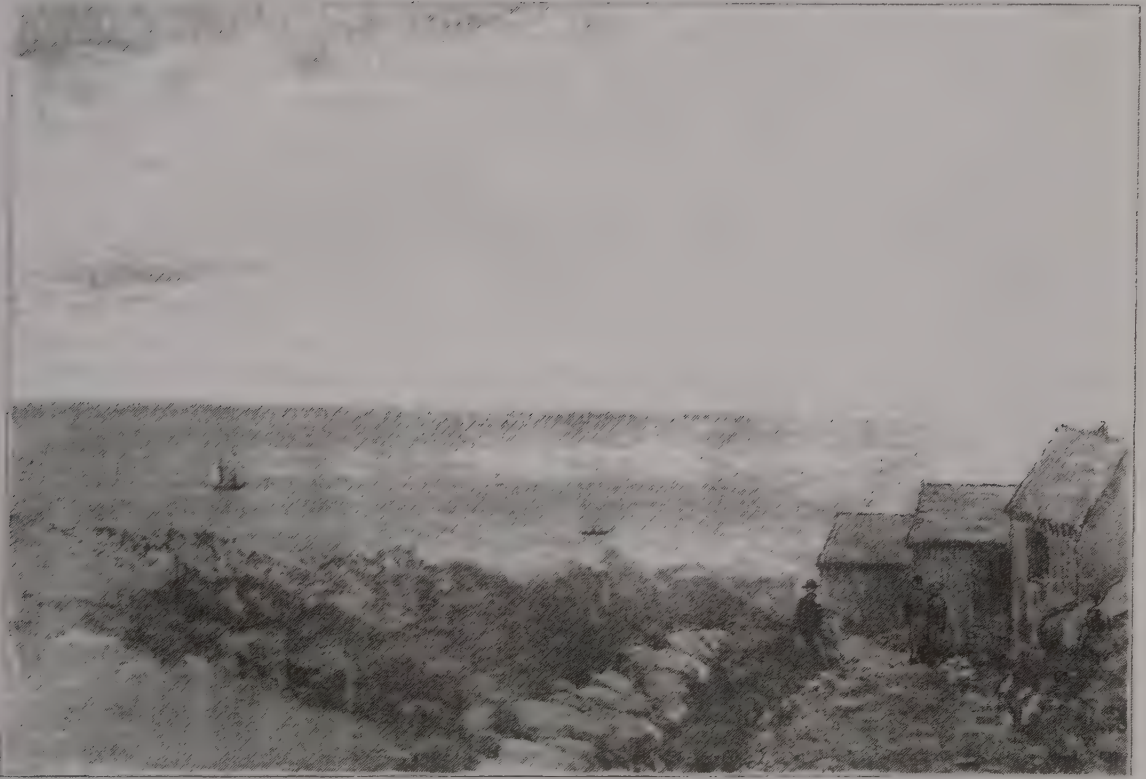
The south western peninsula is interesting to geologists as a volcanic region containing the sulphur mines of Krísuvík, the hot springs of Reykja-nes (Reek-ness) and the submarine volcanoes of Eldey (Fire island) off the coast, near which fire has been seen to rise out of the sea. To zoologists these rocks are interesting as the last refuge of the Great Auk. The species was elsewhere extinct, but about the middle of the 19th century, a few surviving birds were found here, and being unable to fly they were easily caught. The Icelanders who ate them little knew what a meal they were having. To other tourists Reykjanes will be interesting because upon it stands the sole and only lighthouse of all the dangerous coasts of Iceland. But to the antiquary in search of saga-sites it is completely blank. The early settlers naturally took the most fertile fields and dales, and left the wild volcanic regions untenanted: so that historic sites are rarely found except among scenery where prevailing forms are less curious and grotesque, but more beautiful, than the Inferno-landscape which is popularly thought to be characteristic of the country.



### 5. INGOLF'S-FELL.

Though on the site of the first permanent Icelandic colony—for here at last Ingolf's high-seat pillars drove ashore, A.D. 874—the modern capital has no romantic history attaching to it. The modest cathedral and Parliament house; the turfed square with its statue of Thorvaldsen the sculptor, whom they claim as half an Icclander by descent; the foreshore with its two slips and range of wooden warehouses; the four or five streets of shanties and shops, with corrugated iron a good deal in evidence, and ponies standing about everywhere; a town that strikes one as rather forlorn, and hardly picturesque, though interesting to the new-comer with a kind of world's end interest,—Ultima Thule reached at last:—all this has been sketched and photographed often enough. The immediate neighbourhood also is low-lying and bleak. To south and east are far-off hills, dark and unaccentuated, across which lies the road of Hellisskard leading to Ingólfs-fell, the traditional burial place of the first settler, on the edge of that plain of the south, between Eyjafell and the port of Eyrarbakki, along whose shore we have sailed.

But when we turn our eyes northward from the harbour of Reykjavík, or from the Skjálfandi, the watch-tower built by the lads of the College, we begin to discern the real character of Iceland. We begin to see the possibilities of such romantic setting as we shall find for the stirring tales of old. In precipitous headlands, point behind point, Esju-berg and Akra-nes and the moant shores of Borg; and far in the north, seventy miles across the bay, two tops of lofty peaks, lifted out of the horizon by mirage, and culminating in the great dome, clear-cut against the sunset, of Snæfells-jökul.



6. SNAEFELL FROM REYKJAVÍK, SEEN ACROSS FAXAFLOI.



From Reykjavik the first excursion must be to Thingvellir, to the site of the famous Althing, the parliament of Republican Iceland. While Europe was crying to heaven for deliverance *a furore Normannorum*—here the wrath of the Vikings bound itself by laws, and abode by them. While great races like the French, the Germans, the Italians, were still disunited, and national patriotism not so much as thought of, here all Iceland met with identical interests and equal rights. While the English were groaning under Danes or Normans, here the kindred of those Danes and Normans came together to assert their freedom from foreign rule, and to anticipate by many a century the idea of self-government which we are still struggling to realize. "By all for all" was easier for them, perhaps, than for us nowadays: and yet there were conflicts of race and religion, and many a crisis in their politics: but they achieved and maintained their Commonwealth,—with what loyalty the story of the christening of Iceland shows.

In A.D. 1000 the Christian chiefs Hjalti and Gizur rode to the Althing and attended mass with their followers on the Thingbrekka—the lower ridge of Almanna-gjá. Carrying incense they went in procession to the Lögberg, and appealed to their assembled countrymen to give up idolatry and worship the White Christ. Suddenly a man came running with the news that a flood of burning lava was threatening the homestead of one of the temple-priests: and men began to murmur at the Christians, and to cry out that the Gods were angry;—behold the token! Then stood up Snorri the Priest, wisest and wiliest of the heathen age. There, in the midst of that weird volcanic scene, pointing to the crags of basalt overhead and the cliffs of black rock, once—as they well knew—molten torrents from the crater yonder, poured abroad in ages long past, when their land was unknown and uninhabited, and now their familiar meeting-place—"What angered the Gods," he cried, "when *this* was cast forth?"

Then men bethought themselves, and chose one to judge between the two parties,—the two Deities at the bar of their court. Think, for a moment, of the justice of those heathens, that their own law-man, Thorgeir the pagan, was chosen umpire in the suit: think of the patience and faith of the converts who left it in their foes' hands to rule—and in their God's to overrule.

Thorgeir lay in his booth for three days and three nights, meditating. He drew his skin-cloak over his head, and pondered in darkness and silence. When the three days and three nights were over, he rose and came forth, and standing on the Rock of Laws gave it for doom that Iceland should be Christian.

What reason did he give for the decision? Simply this, that otherwise there would be war. The whole people accepted his word: warriors all, who lived for fighting: but *this* kind of war, a war of friend with friend and brother with brother, they could not face. And while the Charlemagnes and Olafs had stained their masterful missioning with blood, here the great revolution was peacefully accomplished by the commonsense of one, and the loyalty of all.

They were delightfully—childishly—practical, all the same. The next thing was to be baptized, and Öxará was chilly. So away they rode to the nearest hot springs;—"Here's clean warm water, whether ye will or no!"





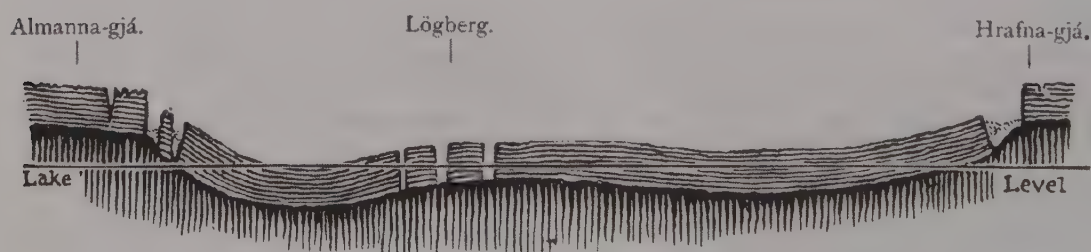
7. BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THINGVELLIR (from a Model).

The scene of these and many other stirring events has been often described : but it is so unlike anything in ordinary landscape that no word-painting gives much notion of it. Our view of a carefully made model shows the lie of the land in a general way, and the following sketches and notes will make the saga-reader understand with some completeness the aspect of this wonderful temple of Law and Liberty, unique in its architecture and in its history.

The newly made road leads easily from Reykjavik in about 35 miles through lonely moorland scenery, in which there is little of interest, unless it be the very bleakness and bareness of the barren land, undulating far and wide, with clouded mountain tops behind the rolling sky-line, and far-off glimpses of white and blue. Suddenly and without warning you rein up at the brink of an abyss. You are on the edge of a huge wall of rock, to right hand, to left hand extending for miles, without a break. Beneath, at a dizzy depth, is a narrow ravine, a green lane between walls of black rock. The cliff over against you is low, but steep, and from its crest the ground slopes away to a broad valley; the nearer side of it meadow land, with a church, and a homestead, standing lonely among fields, just beyond a winding river, which spreads out, to your right hand, into a vast lake, with islands in the distance, and mountain ranges beyond and around, far reaching, and solitary, and stern.

Down a cranny of the precipice the road winds into the depths of the ravine, the new road now replacing the ancient Giants' staircase from block to block of lava: and from below you look up at the frowning ramparts on each hand, as in some deserted grass-grown street of a mediæval Italian town where lofty palaces, loopholed and barred and castellated, throw the narrow footway into noonday gloom. But the grass is soft and thick: sheep graze along the footing of the cliffs, and ferns and flowers nestle in the crannies of the ravine where All Men used to congregate.

Almanna-gjá,—All-men's—*geo*, as they say in the Orkneys; *giâu*, the Manx have it still: "g'yow" you must say to get the modern Icelandic pronunciation. Its reason why, and physical geology, can hardly be seen at such close quarters; but the ideal section we offer may help to explain it.



8. THE LAVA SHEET.

Once on a time the place was a broad flat valley, banked by low hills, behind which the mountains were set far back. Then, at some not very remote epoch, a volcano burst forth at the head of the valley to the northward. A great stream of lava overflowed the valley and its banks: and as the eruption subsided the still molten matter drained downward into the lake—with what seething and scalding who can imagine? but leaving a layer of gradually solidifying rock spread like a coverlet all over the bed and over the bolster as well,—over

the long low bank of hills confining the valley. In cooling, the lava cracked across the line of tension, the lateral drain downward from the banks to the middle of the broad current's channel. Just as a glacier breaks away from the wall of rock at its sides, leaving a *bergschrand*, so this lava current cracked away along the edge of the valley, leaving the Almannagjá on the north-west and a similar ravine, the Hrafna-gjá (Ravens'-clift), on the south-east. The outer edges of the great cracks remained aloft on the bank, the inner subsided and sloped with the fall of the land beneath. This intervening space was partially filled with débris, and here and there with a great splinter left upstanding; while the drainage water rose to the level of the lake in all the cracks of the central part of the lava field, half filling them, and forming such chasmy channels as almost make an island of the "Lögberg."

From the hills of the north the river Öxará (Axe-water) flows across the moors, and, coming to the precipice of Almannagjá, dashes over it at once in a fine single cascade, without so much as trying about for a convenient side-rift; though there are side-rifts—one by which the road descends, and others which will repay an afternoon's exploration—labyrinthine back alleys under vertical walls with their battlements of huge detached blocks poised, it seems, insecurely on this perilous edge, and all sorts of surprises in elfin grotts and fairy dells, smothered in foliage and flowers that contrast so daintily with their savage setting. But Öxará cares for none of these. It makes for the edge, and over it, and roars away down the ravine until it finds a breach in the lower wall, and escapes in another cascade. Just before it escapes, however, it finds pause in a little lakelet surrounded by ragged pinnacles of rock. Here, they say, certain criminals used to be executed by drowning; and on the islets formed by the river below its second fall, where it begins to spread itself out comfortably on the flat ground—reached at last. On these "holms" the "holmgang," or wager of battle, used to be tried. The Icelanders of the Viking age were as modern in their treatment of scenery as in their attitude towards politics. Individually, they felt the influence of landscape, as we shall find in the course of our wanderings; but, collectively, they were strictly utilitarian:—used the rock-set pool to drown in, and the grassy holms to fight on, because they were the fittest places.

Across the water we get upon a maze of cracks in the lava field, of which two of the broadest and most defined, joining as they approach the north, enclose a long narrow tongue of land known as the Lögberg. It is a tradition that Flosi, who led the Burners of Njál, leapt the chasm on the north-west side to escape pursuit at the fight he stirred up when his party were outlawed at the Althing for their deed. Now-a-days, the rock seems to have fallen in at this point. We can scramble without much difficulty over the disjointed blocks, and so reach the "Lögberg."

Standing here, we get the view which has often been sketched and described:—The green, flowery platform, marked on both sides by sharp, steep gulfs from the brown, moss-grown lava-field; the long wall of Almannagjá completely shutting in everything on the right hand; Öxará tumbling over it and out from the ravine, winding away to the church and parsonage; behind which is the broad gleam of the lake, with Sandey and its other islands, and the peaks of Hengil rising in the distance, snow-streaked, and touched upon with sunlight. (*See the Frontispiece.*)



9. THE FALL OF THE ÖXARÄ.



















There is no doubt about the unfamiliar character of the scene. The chasms on either hand—Flosi's gjá and Nicholas' gjá—are as clean cut as crevasses in a glacier; and, like some crevasses, their depths are filled with water, clear and smooth, softly flowing towards the lake, and green-blue, cyanine blue, against the stones underneath. There are infinite varieties of grotesque and picturesque form in these gjás, and in sunshine their colour comes out—lichen and moss, fern and flower, against the deep rich browns and glittering greys of the rock, and the Labrador-spar gleams of water, and the fluor-spar purple-pinks of the bare distant mountains, and the sapphire atmosphere of Iceland in summer. For some of those who have gone up to spy the land have brought an evil report of it. It is not the dismal world of brown and grey we have been told about. It is a land of brilliant colour when the sun shines; and that is not seldom.



11. THE LÖGBERG. LOOKING NORTH.

Turning with our backs to the lake, (No. 11), we see how completely this parliament-field of the Vikings was environed by mountains. The forms here, indeed, are not as Alpine as elsewhere in Iceland, but the sky-line is high, sometimes finely accentuated, often broken with snow-patches, and in the more distant groups there are great gleams and domes of white. It is as true now as in Snorri's time that volcanic agency is known only by its remains; there are no active craters in this part of Iceland; and as the face of the ground was in Snorri's time, so it is now. The road stops abruptly (1897) in Almannagjá. The tracks by which you ride from Thingvellir are the ancient bridle-paths. There are no enclosures, except the few fields round the parsonage. Everything is in primitive wildness, and even the "booths" of the earliest age have been left, though in ruins, along the banks of Öxará. Here, on the Lögberg, are the remains of a booth, one of those stone buildings without roof standing ready to be tented over for the chief and his men at their midsummer visit to the Althing.

One asks—Why a booth on the Lögberg? Modern antiquaries, such as the late Gudbrand Vigfússon and Dr. Björn Olsen, the present Rector of the College at Reykjavik, would answer that this spot was never the Lögberg at all. It was (according to Vigfússon) the Byrgis-Búd—the Fortress Booth—which Flosi held; from which he escaped by his traditional leap. To this place Haflidi, not getting a hearing at the true Lögberg, moved the court; and so the general supposition is in a way true. But the idea that this was the Mount of Law is a modern fallacy; dating, says Vigfússon (in his Oxford edition of Sturlunga Saga, 1878), only from the time when the publication of Njal's Saga in 1772 set local antiquarianism to work making bricks without straw, and too hastily fixing sites without consulting authorities.

If we return to Almannagjá, we notice how all the booths lie along the river at the foot of the lower ridge, Thingbrekka, the Parliament-Slope: some, indeed, as in our picture,



within the Almannagjá. We have heard, from the Kristni Saga, how the Christian chiefs in A.D. 1000 went to the Thingbrekka to address the people from the Rock of Laws, which, it says, was near the West-firth booth, afterwards Snorri's. Sturla's Saga tells us that the Lögberg was close to Snorri's booth, afterwards Sturla's, called the Hlad-búd, and beside the breach where the road comes through the gap of Thingbrekka. At the other end of Thingbrekka was the Virkis-búd, beside the lower fall of Öxará.

In 1742, Jón Ólafsson, by his own account, broke up the remains of a circle of stone seats on the Thingbrekka, between the road and the river. He rolled the stones down to

12. PLAN OF LÖGRETTA.





13. ALMANNACHA



14. THINGBREKKA AND ANCIENT BOOTHIS IN ALMANNAGJA;  
CHURCH AND LAKE IN THE DISTANCE.



make stepping stones over the water. This must have been the old Doomring of the Lögrétta, or court of justice, of which plans are given in a "Descriptio Nova Islandiæ," by P. Resenius, a 17th century manuscript, folio, No. 8, in the Royal Library at Stockholm. According to this, the later court was rectangular; the earlier was circular; but the arrangement of places was the same in both. The "Satrap," in the quaint Latin lettering of the MS., which we simplify in our diagram from the original, or *Præfectus Regius*, had his seat on the east side. A gate to the north admitted the men of the North and West, who sat round the circle, with the lawmen—"Nomophylaces"—next the Governor. The men of the South and East quarters came in by the opposite gate, and sat in the same order. In front of the Governor were the Clerks of the Court, and the middle space was filled by Pleaders and Witnesses—"Causidici et Testes eorum hic varie convexantur." This was the Doomring on the Thingbrekka and here, and not out on the plain, Arngrim, writing about 1640, says that the Althing was held.

The Rock of Laws, Lögberg, then remains to be fixed. Dr. Björn Olsen holds, in a paper printed in 1893, that it must be identified with a spot on the Thingbrekka, where ashes and remains of a wall have been found. We venture to suggest that these are ruins of a booth; and looking at the place with an eye to practical convenience, remembering that the use of the Rock of Laws was not for many to meet upon, but for certain speakers to use as their pulpit, we cannot help thinking that the isolated rock shown in our picture (13) may have been the Lögberg. It is easily ascended from the side not seen in the view. It is too large to have been detached from the wall of the gjá, as some think. It commands the ridge of Thingbrekka, and the floor of All-men's ravine, giving the opportunity of addressing the largest audience from the most conspicuous position, with the great sounding board of the precipice behind to add to the sonority of deliberate utterance. This meets the natural requirements, and being close to the Lögrétta, close to the Booths, fits in with all the indications given by the sagas. And it is most distinctly what the name implies—it is a Berg, a Rock; no other place could have been so well chosen for the Lögberg, the Rock from which Law was proclaimed.

Across Öxará once more we come to the Church, before the door of which stands a relic in the great boulder on which they say the cloth (wadmal) was measured off, when so many ells were paid in fines. The marks on the stone, however, are not artificial grooves cut to fix the standard ell, as is generally said. The stone is one from the trap rock of the surrounding district, which continually shows parallel lines of bubble holes, exactly like the similar formation in the English Lake District.

The old altarpiece, decorative and quaintly characteristic of the native art of Iceland, has lately been turned out of the Church, as unworthy of modern progress. We cannot help recording a regret which will be shared by many, at the disappearance of so much interesting and curious Church furniture, throughout Iceland. To the modern clergyman it may not seem worthy of its place; but to a student of art and of antiquity all these minor links with the past—rustic altarpieces, vestments, church plate, font bowls, candlesticks, carvings, tablets, tombstones—are most valuable when they are seen *in situ*; and nothing can excuse or replace the loss of them.



15. HAUKADAL AND THE GEYSIR.

The Geysir, which every tourist goes to see, was not one of the sights in the saga time. At least, it is never named by the ancient writers, though the greatest of them lived all his early life in full view of the place, and only a few minutes' ride from it.

At Haukadal (Hawkdale), Ari Fródi, the author of "Landnámabók," was brought up by Hall Thórarinnsson, a renowned chief, who had been St. Olaf's friend and companion in youth, and settling at this spot in middle life, lived here till he died, aged 94. He could remember being baptized by Thangbrand (says Heimskringla) in the year before Christianity was made law in Iceland—that is in 999, when he was three years old. To him the orphan Ari was brought, from Helgafell (about 1073), at the age of seven, and the old man "taught him many things which he wrote down." Ari lived at Haukadal for fourteen years, and if the Geysir was then so wonderful a phenomenon as it is now, it is strange that he made no mention of it in his survey of the country. Possibly it was only a group of hot springs, such as exist everywhere in Iceland, and its colossal powers may have been quiescent at the time, or developed at a later date.

The scenery of this valley is not striking. The present farmstead is built in an unusual manner of squared blocks of stone, perhaps from the ancient house. On the Church door is a bronze ring of mediæval type, set in a circular plate, with an inscription which has puzzled antiquaries. We read it—“*Uítt star buít brítta dyrr, buít á þau*”: “Wide stands ready the steward's door; the farm owns it.”

One is tempted to fancy that in this phrase the priest, as steward of the Church, throws open the house of God: though free to all, it is not theirs, but His.

But as *britti* or *bryti* was specially used of the bishop's steward at the old Cathedrals of Skálholt and Hólar, it is, perhaps, more likely that this ring was originally on the door of the steward of Skálholt. At the Reformation, when much havoc was wrought among ecclesiastical buildings, it may have been transferred to this Church door, as an ornament, without reference to the meaning of the inscription.



16. RINGPLATE OF HAUKADAL CHURCH DOOR.

(Actual Size).



## II. THE SOUTH: COUNTRY OF BURNT NJAL.

A day's ride south of the Geysir, partly through brushwood, but chiefly over sodden marshland of little interest, we come to Skálholt, site of the earliest Church which took root and flourished in Iceland. One or two, said to have been planted by Christian settlers a century earlier, died away into the general paganism of the age. This of Skálholt remained, and became the Cathedral of the southern bishopric.



17. SKALHOLT.

It stands on a great tongue of land, Biskups-tunga, between two broad and unfordable rivers, Brúará and Hvítá, and close to their waters-meet, beyond which rises the isolated mass of Vördu-fell. The land is hilly hereabouts, although more than ever marsh-like, being without native rock at the surface, and entirely formed of moraine-stuff and masses of boulder clay, the glacial detritus of ranges seen in the distance all around.

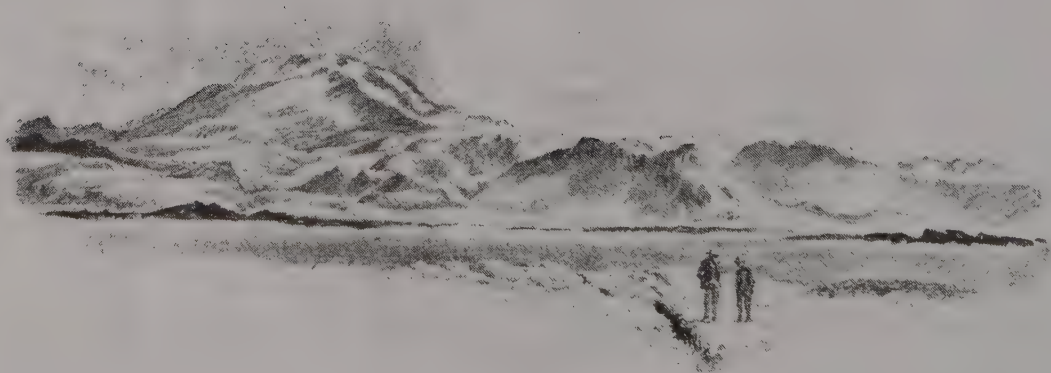
A stranger naturally wonders why a site so little accessible was chosen for the Cathedral. The answer is that the early Church here grew into a bishop's seat owing to the personal convenience of the chief who became bishop, and owned the site. It was his home and Church; and, in spite of surrounding rivers and swamps, a central spot for all the South country, and within a day's ride of Thingvellir.

A sketch of Skálholt Cathedral, done in 1772 by one of the artists who accompanied Sir Joseph Banks on his travels in Iceland, is to be seen in the British Museum, and shows a building closely resembling the pagoda-like Norwegian "Stavkirke." This has all perished. In the Churchyard the ruins of the Krosskirkja are shown; a former Church, small in extent, and cruciform in plan, which is unusual in Iceland, where the present Churches are very simple structures. Under the floor of the bare wooden shanty which represents the

Cathedral are great slabs of marble, some of them carved in Italy, the monuments of departed bishops and great men. Other stones, earlier and ruder in their sculpture, lie broken and defaced beneath the timbers, and some fragments may be found built into the wall of the Churchyard. Among the graves is shown a nameless mound, which marks the resting place of the only daughter of Bishop Brynjólf Sveinsson, of Edda fame. She was a girl of great intellectual power, fond of study, and, unhappily for her, too fond of her tutor. Betrayed and deserted by him, and severely treated by her father, she died of a broken heart, only twenty-one years old.

The sagas say nothing about Hekla. In the heroic age it had not yet gained tragic interest as the centre of devastating eruptions. Any previous activity had been earlier than the Landtaking of the Northmen.

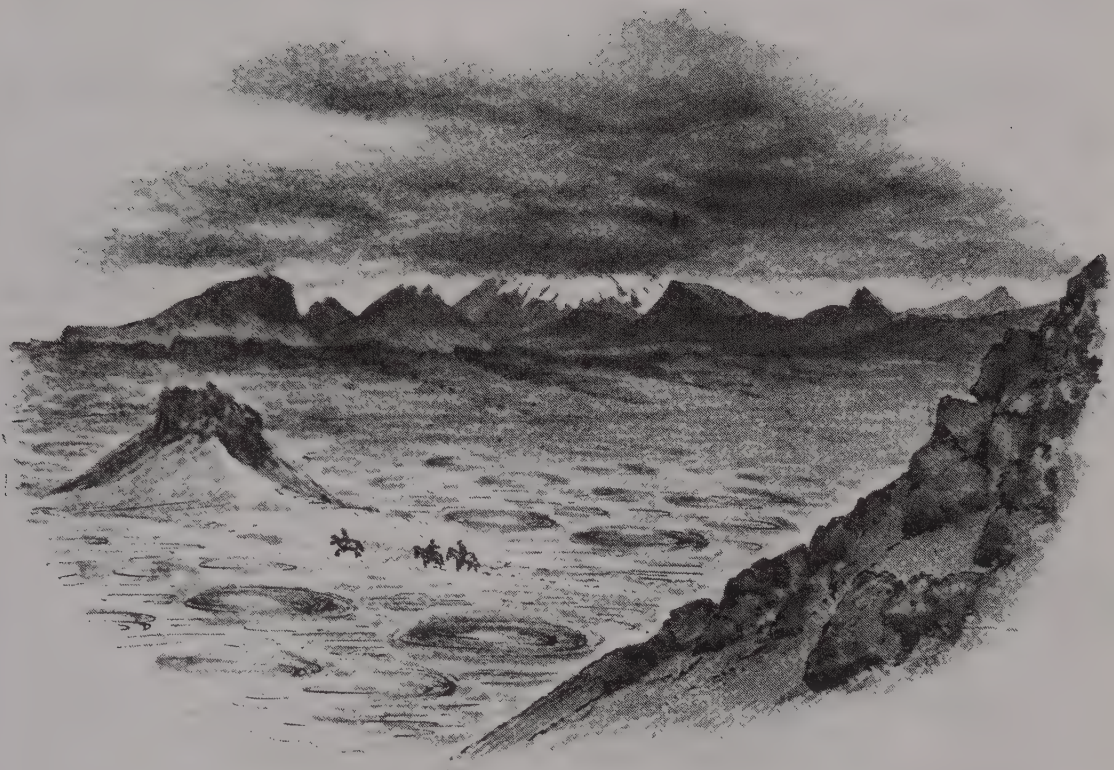
It is not a majestic mountain. A cluster of cinder cones and ugly rugged lava, cast forth in a desert of dismal sand, black and brown in the sunlight, without a line of the tender curvature that glaciation or aqueous erosion gives; without even the subtle harmony of stratified formation; without enough snow upon it to soften the outline of its summit, or strength enough in its substance to break into precipices of significant sternness; it impresses the eye less than any other mountain of its height. And yet, under the cloudhood, the "Hekla" from which it gets its name, its repose is even more impressive to the imagination, like the heave of a dragon among the foliage of his lair.



18. HEKLA FROM FELLSMULI.

(cracks of the earthquake of 1896 in the foreground.)





19. KNAFA-HOLAR.

On the skirts of Hekla, and half smothered in the sand that is still encroaching upon many a league of pasturage, and thrown into strange swirls by the wind, two little rocky hillocks rise, one on either side of the track. Here, in A.D. 986, the enemies of Gunnar, the outlawed hero of Njál's saga, set upon him, fifteen men, as he rode homewards with no companions but his two brothers.

He had slept by the wayside, and dreamt of a fight with wolves, in which his brother Hjört was killed ; but in spite of the omen, Hjört had refused to turn back. As they came to this spot, Knafa-hólar, the Knaves' hills, they saw spears in ambush, and rode off to a vantage ground on a ness by Eastern Rángá, one of the great rivers that flow from Hekla and its associated mountains, and traverse the great plain of Rangár-vellir (" Crooked river-fields "). On the ness they halted to defend themselves, and a great and memorable fight was fought.

One incident in it is grimly comic, and curiously illustrates the immediate painlessness of a sudden wound, as well as death following from shock. Kol attacked Gunnar's brother,

Kolskegg, with a spear, and pierced his thigh. Kolskegg turned sharp round, strode at him with a short sword, and struck off his leg.

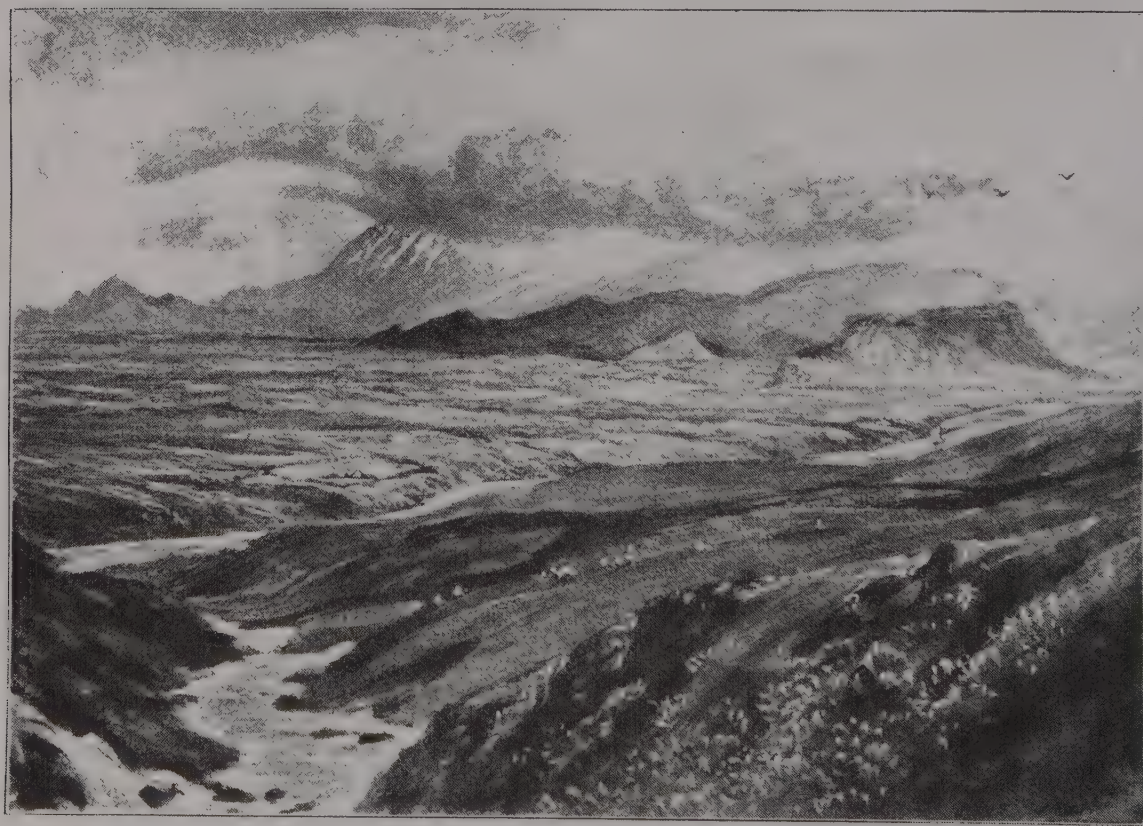
"Did it touch thee, or not?" he cried.

"Now I pay for want of a shield," said Kol, as he stood on one leg and stared at the stump.

"Ye needn't look," said Kolskegg, "It's off, you see"; and Kol fell dead.

In the end Gunnar lost his brother, Hjört, but fourteen of the enemy were left on the field.

The pass to Fljótshlíð, beside the mountain called Thrihyrning (three-corner), was often used by the actors in this story. It was chosen by Flosi as rendezvous of the conspirators who burnt Njál in his house, and in the recesses of the mountain he hid for three days after the deed. From the top of it he could see all the steps that his pursuers were taking in the district.



20. HEKLA, SEEN FROM THE PASS OF THRIHYRNING.





## 21. ODDI.

Bergthórshvol and Westman Islands in the distance.

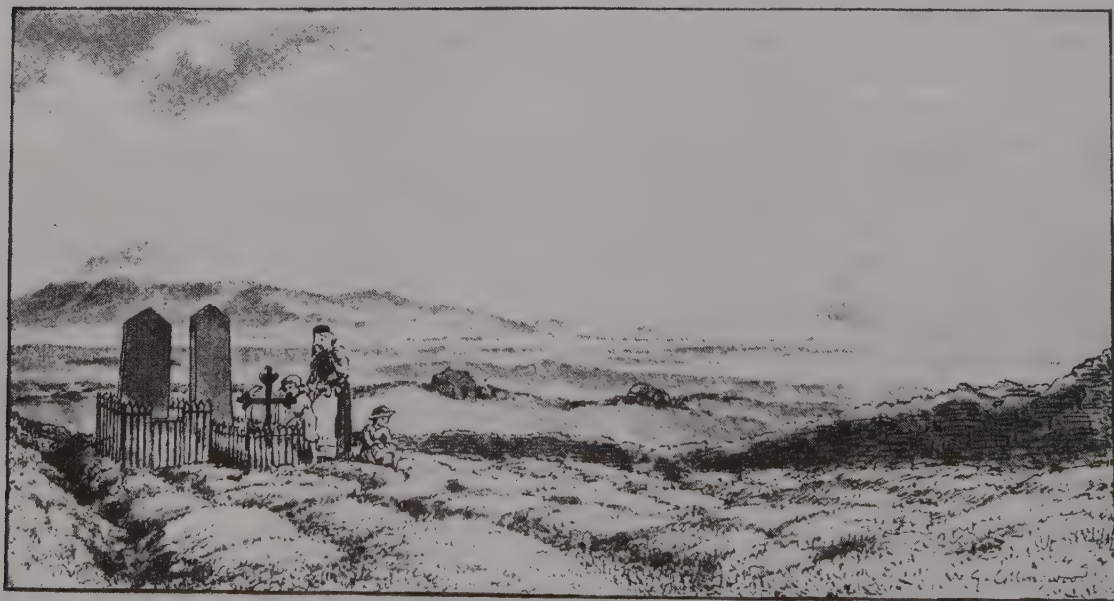
The "point" (like Greenodd, in North Lancashire) standing, as Skálholt does, between two rivers, both called Rangá (crooked river). The house and Church are built in the hollow of a green hill overlooking the greatest stretch of flat country in Iceland. But the mountains are by no means out of sight. Hekla is twenty-five miles as the crow flies, Eyjafell not so far, with the great isolated crag of the Stóri Dimon in the plain beneath it. Between the two snow-tops, Thrihyrning, twelve miles distant, stands up conspicuous. At the same distance, due south, Bergthórshvol stands on its twin hillocks among marshes, the broad Affall winding between it and the sands of this harbourless and surf-beaten shore, with the Westman Islands rising sharply from the sea-line, twelve miles away, and Eyjafell standing nobly over the flats to eastward. Bergthórshvol was, as all readers of the story remember, the scene of the great tragedy of the burning of Njál.

Though mentioned in Landnáma and Njála, Oddi is not important in saga history. It came into notice with Sæmund (1056-1133), the historian, who, after studying in Europe, came back to Iceland at the age of twenty, and became a famous Churchman, and the founder of a great family—held, also, in after ages for a master of magic white and black, and the author of the Elder Edda. "Edda," *the book of Oddi*, "Codex Oddensis," so to say, as Mr. Eiríkr Magnússon shows, is, at any rate, connected with the place. An old tradition tells of a conflict between Sæmund and the devil at the church door. The devil had laid filth on the threshold, to keep the faithful from entering. Sæmund bade him remove it, and, in his hurried obedience to superior power, the devil licked half the doorstone away. The worn threshold stone was in evidence until recent times, when an enlightened incumbent, more anxious to do away with superstition than to preserve an object of antiquarian interest, broke up the old step, and in its stead laid down a fine carved tombstone. The old pulpit, with paintings of devils, has lately been removed, for similar reasons.

Sæmund's great-grandson, Jón Loptsson, was the teacher of Snorri Sturluson, who lived at Oddi from 1181 to 1197 in fosterage. Here, no doubt, he studied the book of Oddi, and first learnt legends which he wrote in the Prose Edda.

The triangular plain of South Iceland, bounded on the N.W. by the hills of Thingvallavatn, and on the S.W. by the sea, is walled on the East by a series of mountain masses, outliers of the great desert of the volcanic and glacial interior. Three of these mountains stand shoulder to shoulder, with their highest points nearly equi-distant on the same meridian:—Hekla, the more northern; Tind-fjalla-jökul, the middle one (with Thríhyrning as its buttress in front); and Eyja-fell, which we have seen from the sea. Between Hekla and Tindfell is the valley of Eastern Rangá; between Tindfell and Eyjafell, the valley of Markarfljót.

Now, opposite Eyjafell, and under Tindfell, the hills fall into the valley in a long steep bank, such as the Icelanders call Hlíð (Lyth, in Northern English), and this, being over Markarfljót, is known as Fljóts-hlíð (Fleet-lyth), famous both for scenery and associations, for it stretches from Gunnar's Hlíðar-endi (Lyth-end) to Njál's Thórólfsfell, and offers a rich series of lovely sites, homesteads among their terraced and sloping meadows, nestling in the cliffs, and alternating with a magnificent succession of waterfalls in ravines; while across the flooded flats and up the winding valley rise the jökuls—black crags, bearing aloft great domes of snow, vast whitenesses among the clouds, from which glacier after glacier streams down, striped and scored with beryl-green crevasses and pinnacled with innumerable séracs, like the Bossons, or the Bois, when Chamouni was at its prime. For this is indeed the Chamouni of Iceland, and Eyjafell the Mont Blanc.



## 22. FROM THE CHURCHYARD AT ODDI

where Sæmund Fróði is buried.

Rangá and Thríhyrning to the left hand. Fljótshlíð and Eyjafell and Stóri Dimon in the distance: Landeyjar and Sea to right.



23. FROM THE PARSONAGE AT BREIDA-BOLSTAD.  
Westman Islands, Thverá, and Bergthór's-hvöl in the distance.

From Oddi we can see the valley opening in the distance; but before we get into the presence of this grand scene—at the entrance to Fljóts-hlíð (the Sallenches, so to say, of the Chamouni)—stands Breidabolstad, under Thrihyrning, on the hillside, well above the flats of the delta of Markarfljót. The branch that runs immediately beneath is Thverá (thwart-river), believed to have been only a small river in saga times, coming down from the hills near Hlidar-endi. At some time or other Markarfljót broke across the neck of low land which divided it from the little Thverá, and since then has been throwing more and more of its volume into that direction, so that the pasturages under Fljótshlíð are being washed away, to the enormous loss of small landowners all along the line.

Breidabolstad ("Braid-bowstead"—might be a Westmorland name) was the home of Sighvat the Red, of Norway, and of his son, Sigmund, killed at Sandhólar Ferry in a fight which gave rise to a long vendetta. Mörd, the son of Sigmund, was one of the most celebrated law-men of the age. On the opposite side was the family of Lyth-end, descended from Baug, an Irishman, foster-brother of Kettle Hceing, who was the first comer into these parts, living at Hof, between Oddi and Keldur. He was the father of Hrafn, first law-speaker to the Althing, and his great-grandson was the famous Gunnar (Hámunds-son), of Lyth-end. So it was, in the course of hereditary feud, that Mörd, the lawyer, and Gunnar, the hero, came to be pitted against one another, and yonder was the scene of the culminating tragedy—the two little knolls in the distance, clear against the sky.



The Church of Breidabolstad is famous for its chalice and paten, which, according to a widespread belief, are endowed with mysterious powers. The fairies, they say, stole them to celebrate their own rites, and left a black spot at the bottom of the chalice which no washing will remove. Others say the fairies gave them as a present. Any sick person drinking sacramental wine therefrom will be cured. The vessels are, indeed, most remarkable and precious, being silver-gilt filigree and enamel, of, perhaps, the late 14th century. After running the gauntlet of 500 years in this remote spot, it would be a crime to let them go. But there is little feeling in Iceland for such things. The clergy build their houses with broken bits of their predecessors' tombs, or lay the sculptured stone down for path flags. From this very Church the ancient copper font-bowl has been taken by those in authority, and replaced by a tin wash-basin.



247. THE FAIRY CHALICE.  
(16 centimetres high).



248. CENTRAL ENAMEL OF PATEN.  
(whole Paten, 16.50 centimetres across).

The Church of Keldur has an old font-bowl in hammered copper, apparently German of the 16th century, of which the chief ornament is an inscription repeated all round it, and repeated *backwards* in another circle—DER.IN.FRID.GEIL.WART. It is greatly to be hoped that neither authority nor temptation may be used to remove this and suchlike treasures from their proper homes—the Churches where they have rested for centuries.

The story of Gunnar is too well known to need re-telling in full—and, yet, we may recall how he was led into marrying Hallgerd, daughter of the famous Höskuld, of Laxárdal, in the West,—“Fair of face she was, and tall, with hair as soft as silk,” but with “thief’s eyes,” as her uncle, Hrút, said; and how that word came true when she sent her servants to steal from neighbours, in pure wantonness, and to burn down their storehouse to hide the deed; and then how Gunnar, though he had long time borne with her, lost temper at last and struck her.

In the end, for her continued crimes—not for any misdeeds of his own—he was outlawed, and, bowing to the decree, rode away with his brother, Kolskegg, down the Markarfljót, to join the ship that was to take them abroad. At a spot still called Gunnar’s holm, his horse stumbled in the stony ford, and threw him, and he chanced to look backward.

“Fair is the lyth,” he said. “I never thought it so fair. Blake (yellow) are its acres, and green its meadows. I will ride home and never leave it.” And, in spite of warning and entreaty, he left his brother and rode back.

It was in the autumn of 990 that his enemies got together 40 men, rode over Thríhyrning Pass, and came down the lá—the hollow road, or outrake, from the house to the fell pastures. Gunnar’s dog, the great Irish hound Sám (*Sam* is Gaelic for “sorrel,” from the adjective *sam*, “mild”) was lying on the roof, as dogs always do in Iceland, ready to announce a stranger by his bark. This the enemy had foreseen, and had dragged a neighbour from his home, threatening him of his life unless he enticed the dog away to a deep hollow close to the house (still called Sám’s-gil), and there they killed it—not before it had torn Thorkel open, and howled so that Gunnar woke in his hall, saying, “Foully they handle thee, my fosterling. Thy death and mine will not be far apart.”

At once the attack began. Gunnar was alone with his aged mother and his faithless wife. He killed or wounded one and another of his assailants, until his bowstring was cut. “Twist me a new bowstring out of thy hair,” he said to Hallgerd; “My life lies on it.”

“Now I remember that slap in the face,” she said, and looked on while they broke in and hacked him to death.

He was buried on the hill above, sitting upright in his cairn, in heathen fashion. Soon afterwards, a man and a maid were driving cattle past, and they heard singing in the grave. They were sent to tell Njál, the wise man of Bergthórshvol, the friend of Gunnar. He made them tell the tale thrice over, and talked long with Skarp-hedin, his son, who thereupon went to see Högni, Gunnar’s son, at Lyth-end. “Högni was a brave man,” says the saga, “but distrustful and incredulous. Nobody dared tell him the strange portent.”

The two went out in the evening to Gunnar’s-how, and stood on the south side of it (where the figures stand in our sketch). The moon and stars were bright, but every now and again clouds drove over them. Suddenly they thought the cairn was opened; four lights burned in it, but none of them cast a shadow. Gunnar had turned himself and was looking at the moon, and singing. Then the sight vanished.

“Wouldst thou believe that, if Njál or I had told it,” says Skarphedin.



25. GUNNAR'S HOW AT LYTHEND.

"I would believe if Njál said it, for he never lies."

"Gunnar is merry," said Skarphedin, "because he knows he is to be avenged."

So they rode through the night, and two ravens flew with them: first to Oddi and there they killed two of the slayers: then to the house under Thrihyrning, and killed two more. Then to Hof, and Mórd the lawyer saved his life only by cowardice and atonement. But Gunnar was avenged.

We arrived at Lythend late in the night, riding along the steep banks of Thverá in gathering darkness of a cloudy August evening. It is not one of the houses of call for tourists, who are at any time somewhat rare in Fljótshlíð: and after we had climbed the steep path among the hayfields—and while our friend the priest of Breidabolstad was knocking up the bóndi, there was a somewhat anxious quarter of an hour as we waited for the "*ger so vel*"—"come in, if you please"—that had never failed at so many opened doors by day and night. But the only shadow of doubt was whether accommodation good enough could be offered. The little guest room was cleared and freshly sanded; to suit the English fad of fresh air, a window was taken bodily out; beds were made up—and we slept the sleep of the traveller, while our friend rode back along the crumbling perilous bank in the mirk midnight.





26. LYTH-END.

In the morning we learnt once more that scenery and romance are inseparable. Gunnar's home which he so passionately loved was worthy of his affection—even from the sentimental view of the landscapist. He may not have known why he "thought it so fair": perhaps the bleak acres commended themselves to him as much for practical farming as for poetical fancy. But no modern traveller can fail to note that the one place of all the world where a man, in those distant and rude days, chose deliberately to die, rather than to go out into exile from it, was so magnificently situated.

Our sketch too inadequately renders the scene—Alps and ocean brought together into one unparalleled prospect, and near at hand, all that is most picturesque of nestling pasture and swarded nooks, and flowery dells among the rocks, lifted above the vast level of the plain. Close to the house is the gill where the faithful dog was killed. Up from it runs the hollow way,—Gunnar's *lái*—the outrake to the moor; and above it, on the edge of the moor, his howe overlooking the breadth of the dale and the glaciers of Eyjafell. Ruins are shown of a building beside the farm called Gunnar's hall: but these are on a slope so steep that it is hardly likely they can mark the site of the principal residence, though they may well be the remains of an outbuilding. The hall—which is said by the saga to have been all of wood—must have been where the house now stands, on a narrow flat terrace which is almost the only spot conveniently available for a homestead.





27 HLÍÐAR-ENDI (LYTH-END)  
FROM GUNNARS-HÖLM.

We went with our new friend the bóndi Erlendur over Markarfljót to get the view that Gunnar saw when he turned back from exile. The river is not one torrent, but many, swirling between shoals of gravel and boulders and carrying down the debris of the banks which it is continually destroying. Where in old days were pasture lands, now all is ruin. The next farm (Hlídarenda-Kot) was, when we were there the second time (August 1897), on the point of being moved to higher ground, for after heavy rain the river was visibly eating away the land on which it stood. They were making hay on the bank of the Thverá, which was hourly undercutting and bringing down masses of earth; washing the turf, and the hay upon it, down stream, faster than they could save their crop. The path along the Lyth was no longer in existence; we had to take the hillside to get back to Lythend.

Nowadays the pastures of Lythend are on the farther side of this flood: morning and evening the bóndi has to pilot his milk-maids over to the dairy across the dangerous shifting channels. But once over, the ground is firm and flat,—the fine meadows of the Landeyjar, miles and miles of rich grass. And looking back we saw Gunnar's view—his home on the Lyth, under the dark tops of Thrihyrning, with Thverá—the peaceful ancient Thverá, glittering in a chain of waterfalls down among the hayfields, beside the steading; and up the valley Njal's mountain farm of Thórólfsfell with all the glaciers of Eyjafell and Godaland around it.

Turning the promontory of Eyvindar-múli we soon arrive at Barkarstadir in the heart of the mountains. From the heights above it, among deep-cut ravines and noble waterfalls, we sketched Eyjafell once more, and a nearer view of the valley with Thórólfsfell to the left, Godaland to the right, and the wild fairyland of Thórsmörk under the sunset light.

While one of our party was thus occupied, the other made a farther excursion up the valley.

"With a guide I crossed the rapid glacier river, Markarfljót, which every day must be forded in a different place. We intended to spend the night in the glacier oasis, Thórsmörk. After a long scamper over boulders, and rivulets falling into Markarfljót, we reached the sheltered combs which like a wedge intersect the glacier. The luxuriant growth of grass and fern and birches in these hollows is in striking contrast to the white and blue glacier which overhangs and juts out over them. Little fells divide Thórsmörk into sections of the greatest imaginable variety. It may be said to exhibit *en miniature* all the rural beauties of Iceland. The sheep love to linger there winter and summer, for the trees, which sometimes reach twenty five feet in height, and the numerous caves, afford them shelter against wind and snow.

"We spent the night in a cave whose roof and walls were covered with beautiful, tiny ferns, with solitary mountain flowers here and there. The floor was made of soft moss, and the mouth of the cave was closed with thick branches. A streamlet flowing down from the face of an abrupt rock near by lulled us to sleep. It was a warm summer night, and the overhanging glacier gave out a pleasant coolness. Now and then one could hear a sheep bouncing past, to seek new pastures. The murmurs of the glacier, Eyjafjallajökul, under which a volcano sleeps, had a strange sound in the deep silence. My guide told me of his sheep-hunt on the glacier, when one of the sheep fell into a ravine where it remains frozen to this day. The difficulty of hunting up all the sheep in the combs of Thórsmörk is very great.

"In the morning we explored the rest of the hollows. Their formation, their luxuriant vegetation, little waterfalls, peaks and winding crannies create endless surprises."

28. EYJAFELL FROM BARKARSTADIR.

















29. LOOKING UP THÓRSMÖRK.

### III. HVAL-FJORD :

#### THE OUTLAWS OF GEIRS-HÓLM.

Starting afresh upon our pilgrimage from Reykjavík, our way lies past Mosfell, where Egil Skallagrims-son lived in his old age; a quiet, bare valley opening upon one of the long *vœs* which characterize the coast hereabouts. A fjord is generally understood to have mountainous sides; a *vœ* is a fjord in miniature, a long narrow inlet, often winding far into the country, and sometimes with banks fairly high and steep, but not mountain-precipices. The land, which at Reykjavík is only slightly undulating, becomes hilly at Mosfell; and a little to the north east of it we get into the range that runs from the head of Thingvellir valley to Esjuberg—the great bluff seen in the distance from Reykjavík.

Entering this mountain region, the dales become glens and the *vœs* become fjords. We cross Svína-skarth (Swine-scarth) by a good bridle path and drop down to the valley of Reynivellir (Rowan-fields) from which a zigzag path of incredible steepness and roughness leads over the mountain behind, the usual route is easier and more to the north,—to the second great valley, Hval-fjord.



30. HVAL-FJORD FROM BREKKA.



31. GEIRS-HÓLMI.

This is one of the most picturesque of sites, and has one of the most romantic of sagas attaching to it. Hval-fjord (Whale-firth) is a long, deep glen, flooded by the sea so that it is all fjord: sinuous, and steep walled, so that it is entirely landlocked, and appears to be as much of a lake as the Lake of Lucerne; with long rocky promontories running into it, and diverging reaches and recesses of crag-bound waterway wandering out of it; and snowpeaks looking down upon it, and farms here and there set along it, on green shelves of Alp between the crags above and the crags below; and in the midst recalling, like Tell's chapel, the memory of a noble outlaw, is the island of Geirs-hólmi.

It is near a rocky peninsula, that seems almost artificially to divide the land-locked sea-lake, but surrounded with deep water, and unapproachable except by boat. Its sides rise absolutely, vertically sheer from the water-line, all around, with no foreshore except at the north east, where there are a few yards of broken rock, into the cracks of which the bow of a boat may be thrust.

At first sight it seems impossible to climb the crag even here; but the boatman knows the traditional starting-point,—up that rock, across to the next with a stride,—reach aloft to a ledge in the side of the precipice,—round the corner,—and the ledge goes sharply





32. THE EINSTIGI OF GEIRS-HÖLMI.

up, taking you high above the water. This is the *Einstigi*, spoken nearly like "Ainstee," which would surely be understood in our North Country as a "one-man's ladder" or path, like Cat-sty on Helvellyn. You can feel that the people at the top were pretty safe from invaders. The last bit is the worst, for the rock gives out, and you have to scramble up a loose bank of yellow soil, catching at tufts of grass for support. This part is worse still to come down.



33. HELGU-SKARTH AND THYRIL FROM THE TOP OF GEIRS-HÓLMI.

The summit of the island is fairly level, overgrown with rank grass, and honey-combed with puffins' nests. They and the terns, the sea-swallows, fly screaming round in clouds, greatly disturbed for a while, until you settle down by the ruined house of the Holm-warders to read their story. Then, finding you innocent though human, reassured puffins will alight, and cock a round eye at you, mopping and mowing with the queer snarling smile of their scarlet beaks, sidling up as if they were only too pleased, like the rest of Icelanders, to foregather with a foreigner in search of saga-sites.

There was once a great and good man called Hörd, who was married to a very noble lady named Helga, the daughter of Earl Harald in Sweden. They had two little lads, and many friends: but a curse hung over the family. For in his youth Hörd had broken into a grave in Sweden, as young daredevils used, partly to show he was not afraid of ghosts, and partly to see whether there was not something pretty to get. It did not occur to him that any such objects, if left for a thousand years or so, would be far more valuable to antiquaries. He forced his way into the great barrow—described in the saga in detail that tallies remarkably with archaeological fact: but he found the man alive, reanimated with demon power, a “vampire,” and by no means willing to part with the gold that filled the ship in which he sat, solitary, like the King of Elfland in the Dark Tower when Child Roland came. (Of course it is another edition of the same story, in this part: though the men and their fate are historical enough).

Well: the end of this adventure was that Hörd got a wonderful ring; but the dead man's curse along with it. So at last he fell under the ban of outlawry, and had to flee from the Althing and take boat for this island. His wife and children went with him, and a great company of men, 200, it says, when they were most, and never less than 80 when they were least. They built a great house—and here are its ruins in heaps among the grass: and they made some rough and ready laws for the maintenance of order and efficiency, such as this,—that the whole company must follow the leader, and this again,—that any man, lying sick for three nights, must be thrown over the cliff. They lived on sheep and other victuals “lifted” in the neighbourhood, and maintained themselves for three years; but at last the whole party, except Helga and her children, were decoyed ashore and massacred, notwithstanding a splendid defence.

Helga, who had foreseen the treachery and warned her husband in vain, saw the fight in the distance, and knew that those who had slain the father would seek the sons. She waited only until it was dark: then swam ashore carrying her four-year-old Grimkel. In the night she went up the fell behind Thyril, with one lad on her back and the other at her side; and escaped into the mountain tops through the cleft (seen on the left against the sky-line) still called Helga's skarth: and so away into Skorradal.

Thyril, the farm seen under the crags of the mountain from which it takes its name, was the house of Thorstein Gullknapp (Goldknob) the enemy who brought about the massacre of Hörd and his men. The ruins of his heathen temple are still shown—for this was in pre-Christian days; the massacre is dated 986 A.D.

The name Thyril means a whisk for whipping cream, and must have been meant to apply to the shape of the mountain,—a group of vertical crags with sloping screes spreading out all round, like an inverted Y. Its form, though not its “formation” (for this is trap rock, not limestone) resembles the Rochers de Lanfon on the Lake of Annecy, well known for their striking and singular abruptness on the top of a symmetrical cone of smooth turf. We may note that the comparison in Cleasby and Vigfússon's dictionary between Thyril and “Cumbrian *thyrel*, a porridge stick” is an error: the word is *thyvel* or *thible*: and surely the shape of the mountain, rather than “the whirling gusts of wind to which it is liable,” has given the name.





34. KÚHALLAR-DAL.

On the way to Skorradal by the valley of Svinadal (Swindale) we pass Kúhallar-dal, named in the saga as the dairy farm of Thorstein Ox-goad. It is a narrow and picturesque little glen, with three pleasant lakes at its foot, by which the path winds over an easy pass, and beside some fine gills and waterfalls to the long lake and wooded shores of Skorradal.

Like some English lakes, Skorradal-water has low moorland hills along one bank—for we are now nearly through the mountain region which we entered at Mosfell. On the South western side the heights are loftier, rising near the foot of the lake into magnificent Alpine forms. One peak, the Skessu-horn (ogress'-peak) stands out from the rest not unlike a lesser Matterhorn, except for the fantastic regularity of the trap beds which, seen against the sky, look like steps for a giant to climb.





### 35. INDRIDA-STADIR AND THE SKESSU-HORN.

Under this range and near the lake foot is the steading of Indridi, whose wife Thorbjörg was Hörd's sister. To this place came Helga in her flight and sat down without, under the túngarh (the wall round the homefield) and sent Grimkel to the house, to ask Thorbjörg to take them in. "She was sitting on the dais when he came in with his message: and she rose and led him out, and asked who he was. She asked the tidings, and Grimkel took her to Helga. Thorbjörg could not speak a word, *so mickle it took her*: she led them to an outhouse and shut them in."

That night she stood over her husband with a knife and gave him a sore wound, until he cried for quarter. "Fetch me then," she said, "the head of Thorstein of Thyril." Next morning he rode away; watched at the temple for Thorstein's daily visit; smote off his head, and carried it home to his wife: "and everybody thought that Thorbjörg had done a very fine thing."

Grimkel afterwards was killed at the age of twelve, in an attempt to avenge his father; and Helga took her younger boy out to Sweden, to her brother. "She was never married again that we hear of; but Björn grew up to be a great man, and came afterwards to Iceland, and slew many men in vengeance for his father, and was the doughtiest man. Now bring we to end the story of the Holm-warders."



36. VARMA-LEK : Banda in the distance.

## IV. HVÍTÁR-SÍDA :

### FROM SNORRI'S BATH TO SURT'S CAVE.

Hvítá, "white-water"—the English reader must pronounce it "Queetow," strange as the word looks,—was so called by the first settlers, who had never seen a glacier river before, and were astonished at the turbid milky torrent from the fields of Geitlands-jökul (Egil's saga, chapter 28).

Hvítár-síða, "white-water-side" is strictly the *Lyth* on the north bank of the upper valley: but we take leave to extend the meaning a little and use the name as general heading for various sites connected with various sagas, and lying in the basin of this great stream.

Dividing as it does the North from the South of inhabited Iceland, and narrowed by the encroaching sea on the one hand, and the encroaching snow-fields on the other, this district is a sort of isthmus, which all travellers at all ages have crossed in going from the populous north or west to the Althing. Its geography is important to saga history, and many events can hardly be understood without grasping its position, and relation to the rest of the country.

Our route through it will be nearly that which Grettir took (chapter 47) when he rode from Bakki to Bær, Kropp, Deildar-tunga and Gilsbakki, on the mare that belonged to farmer Svein; who pursued him at first for the theft, and then made friends with him for the sake of the joke and the songs they both sang of the race up Whitewaterside.

From Grund in Skorradal, where our last view was taken, a path leads over the hill to Varma-læk, on the edge of the great open valley, and just at the foot of the fine crags at the entrance to Grimsá valley. Varma-læk (warm-beck) was at first the home of Thórarin Óleifs-son the second Speaker to the Althing. Gunnar's wife, Hallgerd, afterwards lived there with her second husband, Glúm: she had been married before—and Gunnar was her third husband. Here, Njál's saga says, "she kept her temper down, and they liked her well enough for the first winter." But before long her foster-father, who had quarrelled with Höskuld her father, quartered himself upon her. At first she was doubtful about receiving him; she could say nothing about his staying there until she had seen Glúm about it. So she went and spoke to Glúm, casting her arms about his neck and saying "Wilt thou grant me a boon?"

"Yes, if it be right and seemly. What is it?"

"Well," she said, "Thjóóstólf has been driven away from the west, and I want thee to let him stay here: but I will not take it amiss if it is not to thy mind."

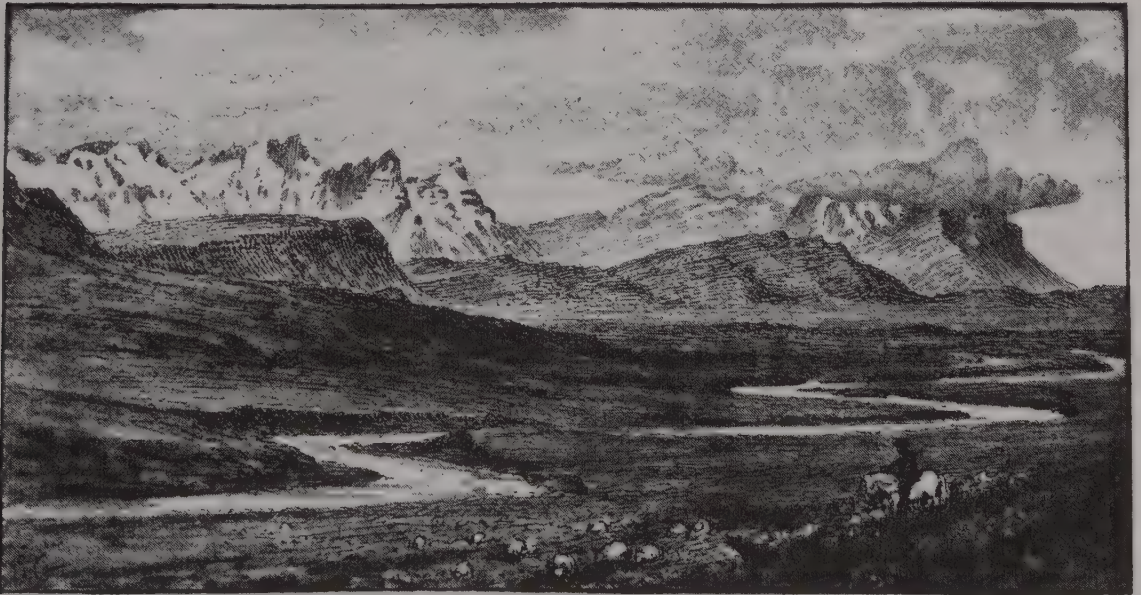
Said Glúm, "Now you behave so well, I agree:"—and so the old man stayed: but soon made mischief.

One time the weather was good, and Hallgerd was sitting out of doors. Glúm came up and said, "Thjóóstólf and I have quarrelled. We can't live together much longer."



She spoke up for her foster-father, and they had words. At last Glúm boxed her ears, and went off, saying, "I'll strive no more with thee."

Now she loved him very much, and could not calm herself: she lifted up her voice and wept. Then came Thjóðólf and said,—“This is sorry sport for thee; it must not happen again.” “Nay,” she said, “Thou shalt not avenge it. Never meddle thou, whatever falls out between Glúm and me.” He went off with a spiteful grin,—and killed Glúm out of hand. Such a foster-father—even without “thief’s eyes” to begin with, and foolish petting at home, would have made Hallgerd the baleful character she became, as we have already seen in the story of Gunnar. But here on the spot and reading the vivid narrative of the saga—how she lives again, in all points like as we are; so human, and sinned against, and sinning.



37. FROM DEILDAR-TUNGA.

Valley of Reykjadal-sá and mountains of Skorradal and Borg.



A little north of this, Hvítá is met by Reykjadalssá (Reekdale-river) so called from the many hot springs that steam into the air along its winding course. A traveller coming upon it suddenly and at a distance can hardly help fancying he is back in one of the dales of Yorkshire, with the puff from the railway rising here, and the smoke from the factory there, among the wide sheep walks and meadows of cattle, between brown hills and a far-off blue range streaked with snow.

Deildar-tunga is on a hill above a whole cluster of boiling sources on the bank of the river: the Deildar-tongue of William Morris's poem of the Wooing of Hallbjörn the Strong. The story is much more simply told in *Landnáma*.

"Hallbjörn son of Odd from Kidberg wed Hallgerd, daughter of Tongue-Odd. They lived with Odd the first winter. There lived also Snæbjörn Galti. There was little love between them, (that is, between the bride and her husband: she preferred Snæbjörn, "Snowbear"), and Hallbjörn made ready to go home in the spring at the flitting-time; and when he was making ready, Odd went from home to the baths at Reykholt where was his sheep farm, for he would not be by when Hallbjörn started, because he was afraid that Hallgerd would not be willing to go with her husband: he had always been making peace between them. So when Hallbjörn had saddled their horses, he went into the chamber where Hallgerd sat on the dais combing her hair, which fell all over her and down to the floor,—for she had the best hair of any woman in Iceland next to Hallgerd with the Tartan Scarf. He bade her stand up and fare: she sat and sulked; then he took her by the hand but she would not rise,—thrice it was so. Then he took his stand over against her, and said in rhyme:

She that should bear me the bowl of glee  
She notes me not, she is fooling me.  
Gay is her gown and her hair so bright,  
But how can I bear the shame and slight?  
Nay, my bride,—O never again  
For the grief that makes me pale with pain,  
For the woe that stings my very heart's core,  
I'll bide no bliss of thee—nevermore!

"So saying he twined her hair in his hand, and would draw her to him off the dais, but there she sat and never stirred. After that he drew his sword and hewed the head from off her: then he went forth and rode away."

It is in this neighbourhood that the story of Hen-Thórir also took place. The burning of Blund-Ketil was at a farm somewhat to the north of Deildar-tunga: but the chief actor in the tale is Odd of Tongue, or Tongue-Odd, father of this Hallgerd, who must not be confounded with other Hallgerds as wayward and as bewitching. In the terse, ancient, traditionary saga, written down in an age when writing was slow and tedious, and style thereby cramped, we get almost a surfeit of tragic incident. But through it all there shines an intense glow of strong passion, like the gold ground of some primitive painting, underneath the faded grey and crimson. These deeds of violence were not crimes of cold blood, nor the mere savagery of a barbaric age. They were the culminating points of passionate lives, the memorable catastrophes told briefly as Dante tells the end of Buonconte or Francesca.



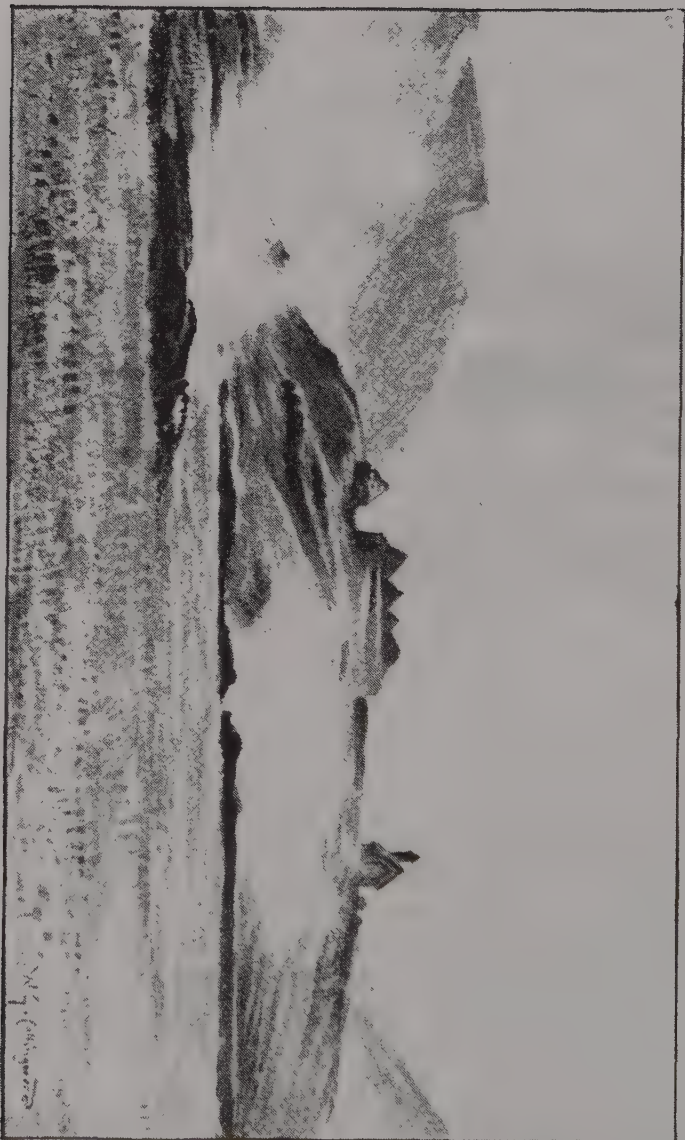
38. WATER-VOLCANO OF ÖSKURHOLS-HVER  
IN REYKJADALSÁ (REEKDALE-RIVER).

After riding two or three miles up the gravelly bed of Reykjadalur, across and across the shallow eddies for the sake of avoiding the miry pastures on either hand, we come to one of these hot springs in the very middle of the river, where it has built itself a little cone of tufa,—a veritable water-volcano; whose scalding and spirting out-put flows down the heated rock into the ice-cold stream from the glaciers of Ok.

Up stream, about the middle of the valley, is Reykholt, on a little hill rising in the midst of flat meadows close to Breiðabólstað, the farm already mentioned of Tongue-Odd, who was the leading man in the Hvítá valley in the days of Hen-Thórir and Egil Skallagrimsson.

Later, Reykholt became the home of the famous historian Snorri Sturluson, author of the Prose Edda and Heimskringla. He lived here from 1205 until his death in 1241, and here doubtless did most of his literary work.

The place takes its name from the hot springs that “reek” at the foot of the “holt”; the largest is called Skrifla, and still used for cooking and washing by the servants of the



39. REYKJAHOLT

With the hot springs: Skrifla on the right hand.





W. G. Collingwood

40. SNORRI'S BATH AT REYKHOLT.



parsonage near by. But no attempt is made to "lay on" the hot water in Iceland; the springs are left to steam in open air, and the laundress or cook has to carry the linen, or the pan of food to be boiled, out through rain or snow to the natural kettle.

In old times more use was made of these advantages. The water of Skrifla was taken in a stone-built conduit to a circular bath, with flagged floor to which steps led down and a seat all round, on which many bathers could sit,—as at Leukerbad—enjoying the warmth. And to bring the boiling water to a reasonable temperature they had only to drop a stone into the conduit and turn off the supply through another channel, leaving the bath to cool. This bath of Snorri, Snorralaug, has recently been cleared of its ruin and one may bathe in it as Snorri did: but the ancient structure that roofed it, and the covered way to the house on the hill, can only be reconstructed in imagination.

From Reykholt the road goes over the hills to rejoin the Hvítá, on the bank of which is Stóri-Ás (Big-ridge).

A little higher the river bed is broken and the Hvítá becomes a great mountain torrent. So far the country has been non-volcanic, except for the hot springs we might have been among Westmorland or Yorkshire dales. But now we come to the tip of a long tongue of lava which fills the valley from this point up to its head near Eiríks-jökul.

To anyone who has never seen such lava, it may be described as a glacier in stone, an overflow intruding on the normal scenery, obviously foreign to the native rock,—cracked and curdled with just the viscous lines of flow and breaks of tension that are seen in a glacier, but black, instead of white. The older lava-beds are filled in all their hollows with pretty foliage and flowers, and the contrast of the dainty blossoms and ferns with the rugged black caves and cliffs in which they are sheltered gives a curious and unexpected poetry to the scene. And as all the rainfall trickles through the cracks, and collects underneath on the surface of the native rock, there are underground streams which come out at the edge of the lava-bed in gushing torrents—just as in the case of glaciers—making sometimes the most picturesque cascades in unexpected combinations of structure and scenery. Where the Hvítá runs in a ravine, exposing the native rock with the lava above it in a long, clear section, between Stóri-Ás and Bjarnafoss, the hidden waters come to light in a most remarkable series of cascades, leaping out half way up the cliff, and foaming down into the chasm below.

At the head of this ravine there is a great waterfall, where the whole Hvítá tumbles over a ridge of rocks between the lava-field and the steep hill that banks the valley. Formerly there was a natural bridge of rocks fallen in and meeting together in such a way as to wedge themselves firmly together, as at Dungeon Gill—only on a larger scale. This bridge served as the convenient crossing place of a river not easily forded—and several times is mentioned in sagas as on the route between North and South. Though the old name is usually written Bjarnafoss (Bjarni's force) it is now called Barnafoss, and a story told of children (barns, bairns) who fell from the bridge and perished in the torrent. Now that the natural passage is gone, a good wooden bridge has been built—not a common feature in this part of Iceland.



#### 41. GILSBAKKI.

Eiríksjökul and Strút to the left, in the distance; to the right, Geitlandsjökul.

On the opposite side of the valley is Gilsbakki (Gill-bank) the home of Gunnlaug Ormstunga, lover of Helga the fair of Borg, and hero of the saga translated by Magnússon and Morris in "Three Northern Love Stories." The story of the tragic fate of the lovers is a northern counterpart to Romeo and Juliet, though differing in plot and setting. Gunnlaug used to play chess with Helga in his youth, and when he came back from his journeys abroad he found she had been compelled by her parents to marry his rival.

Of course, there was a feud and a fight,—a great "holmgang"—at the Althing. So important an event that "this was the third most thronged thing that has been held in Iceland: the first was after Njal's burning, the second after the Heath-slaughters; and this was the last holmgang fought in Iceland, for after this it was made law by the law-court that henceforth all holmgangs should be forbidden" (A.D. 1006),—many a hundred years before wager of battle was abolished by the greater nations of Europe. And if literary art be any token of civilization, surely the touching close of that saga gives a high place to the Iceland of the heroic age.

The present church and parsonage lie among rich meadows on a height overlooking the valley with its lava field and thick copsewoods, and beyond, a fine panorama of glacier-clothed mountains. On both sides of the site deep gills entrench it—whence the name, and perhaps in ancient times added some strength and security to the position. They are at any rate richly picturesque—a fit setting for the love story whose memories haunt the place.













43. GEITLANDS-JÖKUL FROM KALMANS-TUNGA.

Kalman or Colman was an Irishman or Scot from the Hebrides who settled here in the Landnáms-tide, the days of the pilgrim fathers of Iceland. His home lies at the mouth of a ravine overlooking the lava-fields of the upper Hvítá, a wild and lonely mountain region known as Geitland (Goat-land), with the snowy domes of Ok (or Yoke) and Eiríks-jökul on either hand, and long glaciers of Geitlands-jökul in front.

Between these last and Ok is Kaldidal (Cold-dale) through which a mountain pass leads southward to Thingvellir. Kalmans-tunga is the first house the traveller reaches after leaving Thingvellir, more than forty miles distant; and the last house he sees before arriving at the nearest inhabited dales of the North,—Efrinúp, about forty miles, or Grimstunga, about sixty miles by the map: but it seems, and is in effect, much more than the map distance, when you follow the winding and rugged mountain tracks.

It stands, as it stood in ancient days, on the confines of the world, an outpost of humanity. Beyond it, all is rock and glacier, lava valley or highland heath, crossed and re-crossed by raging torrents, and dotted with lakes great and small.\* The wild land is not without wandering sheep, and flocks of ptarmigan and swans: the waters still teem with trout: so that in the days when men were driven out of society for their crimes or their misfortunes, this desert was the outlaws' hunting ground and home.

Under the white curve of Geitlands-jökul, seen from the window at Kalman's-tunga, and among the snow-flecked crags of its buttress, lies the mysterious nook of Thóris-dal,

\*An Icelandic proverb has it that three things are innumerable,—the islands of Breiðfjörð, the lakes of this heath (the Fiskivötn of Arnarvatns-heidi), and the hills of Vatnsdal (see 133).



upon which Grettir the Strong, driven away even by his friends, lighted unawares, when he made for the unknown interior "with a kettle and tools to strike fire withal. He found a dale in the jökul" says the saga, as translated by Magnússon and Morris, "long and somewhat narrow, locked up by jökuls all about in such wise that they overhung the dale. He came down somehow, and then he saw fair hill-sides grass grown and set with bushes. Hot springs were therein, and it seemed to him that it was by reason of earth fires that the ice cliffs did not close over the dale. A little river ran along down the dale with level shores on either side thereof. There the sun came but seldom, but he deemed he might scarcely tell over the sheep that were in that valley, so many they were; and far better and fatter than any he had seen."

Such is the landscape-painting of the saga-man: Homeric in its utilitarian spirit, but not without a charm.

So there he made himself a hut of branches, and took the sheep for his food, until he fell in with the natives. A "half-troll" ruled over the valley, a "giant" called Thórir: with whom Grettir stayed the winter; not without diversion, for the giant had daughters; nor starved, for when fasting time came Grettir decreed for himself (it was in the early days of Christianity) that fat and liver might be eaten in Lent. But in the spring he found it so dreary that he would stay no longer, and wandered away to new haunts among the snows.

After nearly nine centuries Thóris-dal, placed on the maps by conjecture, is said to have been rediscovered by Dr. Thorvaldur Thoroddsen, the great explorer of the wilds of Iceland. He tells us, however, that he does not believe in the identification of any of the mountain-hollows he has found with the valley of the Saga. We, less adventurous, were content to look from afar upon its icy walls, and to enjoy after a broiling day the curds and cream of Kalmans-tunga. Certain books of travel have given the place a bad name: it is only our duty to record that we found it most hospitable.

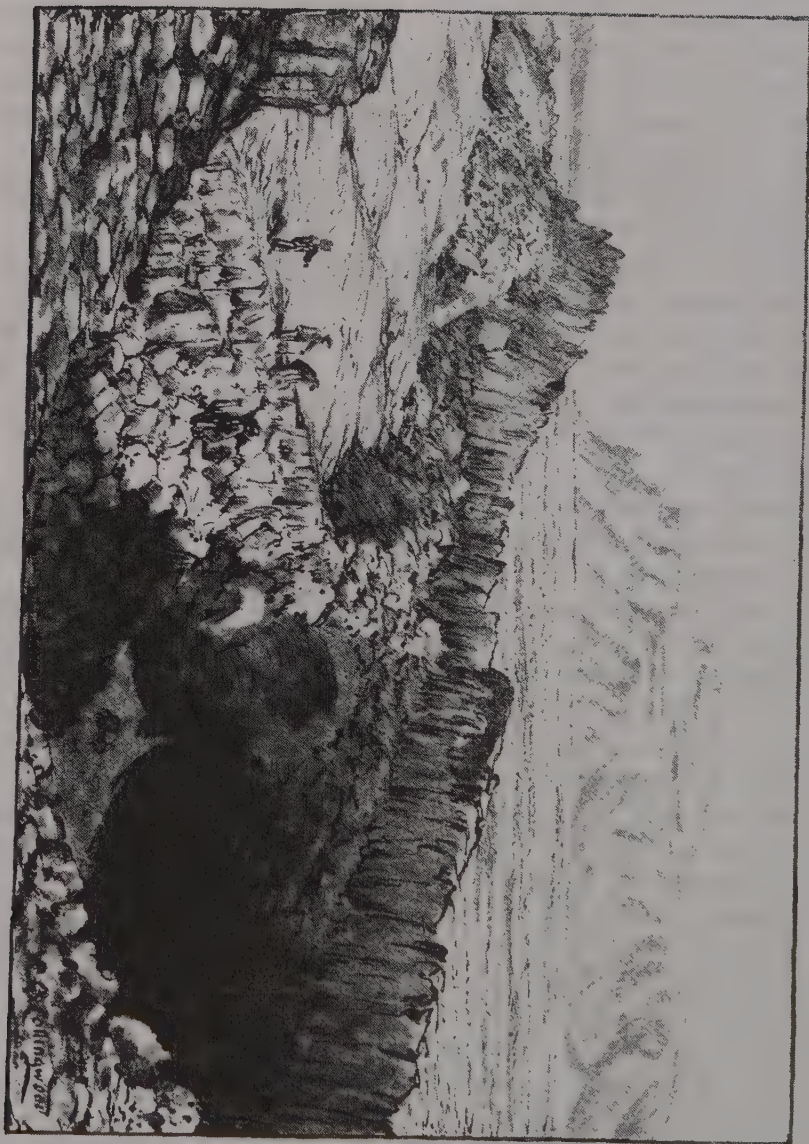
Beside the north road, and on the farther edge of the "hood" shaped hill (Strút) that rises behind Kalmanstunga, is the cave of Surt; a huge bubble hole, or series of such, in the tormented and honeycombed lava. There are several entrances. One, not unfrequently visited, leads to a tunnel of a mile in length, with icicles in every grotesque combination pillaring its glassy floor and festooning its black walls and roof, and ice crystals of interest to science. Another part has some historical associations, though later than the saga time, as the haunt of outlaws who lived on stolen sheep which they summarily slaughtered by throwing down through an opening in the cave roof. Their bad-stofa (bed-room) is shown, and the recess where they sat round the fire, cooking and eating their mutton,—and the bones lie there to this day.

But it is a chilly den to enter, after riding far in unclouded July sunshine, along the bare, open valley without a tree for shade, and little grass to temper the reflection from the heated rock. Distance and foreground alike leap at one in the brightness, and the arched snows of Eiríksjökul blaze overhead in blinding white:—

"It was a miracle of rare device,  
A sunny pleasure dome, with caves of ice."



44. SURT'S CAVE AND EIRIKSJÖKUL.



The jökul is named after an outlaw Eric, who fled up the screes and snows, and was killed upon the summit. The lava-field that spreads far and wide around it is called after a "landwight"—another mysterious creature, who came to Grettir's help when his enemies set upon him hereabouts. This Hallmund lived with his daughter in a cave under the neighbouring mountain of Balljökul, and though he walked invisible and had superhuman might, he was a mortal; for in the end the outlaw Grím slew him, and heard his death song in the cave.

That Thórir and Hallmund have Norse names means no more than that so their Norse-speaking neighbours called them. Their attributes are no more than would be assigned by a primitive folk to the hardy and cunning "native." Perhaps farther research may throw some light upon these apparently mythical accounts of uncanny inhabitants of the desert interior of Iceland. We know that Irish monks had forestalled the Vikings, and were found upon the East coast. It would be strange, considering the migration of primitive races to so many northern regions, apparently inaccessible to their paltry means of transport, if Iceland alone remained untenanted until so recent a date as 870 A.D. It may be,—indeed it must be more than possible,—that in a land so fitted to support life some few human beings lived. The Irish had arrived in their skin currachs; the Greenland bears still reach the coast, now and then, on the drift ice. But any scattered families or tribes would retreat before the Viking settlers and lurk in the wilds, only discovered when an outlaw like Grettir adventured into their retreats: and then they would be regarded with some superstition, as the Norse at home regarded the Finns or Lapps, who were all wizards, they thought. The stock wonders of folk-lore would easily attach to them, and the true tale become distorted into the romance of Grettir's saga. These, however, are the mere artist's fancies, not endorsed by his authorities.

"Grettir went up" says the saga, "to Ernewaterheath (Arnar-vatns-heidi) and made there a hut for himself and dwelt there, for now was he fain to do anything rather than rob and reive: he got him nets and a boat and caught fish for his food: exceeding dreary he deemed it in the mountains because he was so fearsome in the dark."

To him came another outlaw, Grím, offering him comradeship, really meaning to kill him and so win his own pardon. But Grettir foiled his attempt and slew him. Then came another outlaw, Thórir Redbeard, on the same treacherous errand. One night in a storm Thórir broke up the boat they used for fishing so that Grettir had to swim out to get in the nets. "Now the land was so wrought that a ness ran into the water and a great creek was on the other side, and the water was deep right up to the shore." So when he came back to land, Thórir caught up Grettir's short sword that he had left with his clothes, and cut at him. Grettir took a backwards dive and swam under water, and while Thórir still stood staring at the place to catch him when he came up again, he landed, came softly behind his false comrade, and slew him.

After Grettir, the Grím previously mentioned came to the place. It is told how he caught fish, one hundred in one day, and two hundred on the next; no exaggeration, for still the lake teems with trout, and great catches are made when anyone takes the trouble to go so far for the sport.



45. GRETIR'S HUT ON ARNAR-VATN.

From the shore, where even in July the winter snow-drifts lie unmelted under the crags, we have a wide prospect of mountain scenery. The volcanic Eiriks-jökul is close at hand, a heaped dome of snow above strange ugly lines of dead cinders, for all the world like the banks of slag near iron furnaces, but enormous,—Titanic; with a complete glacier of the most crevassed and tumbled sort, reminding us of old pictures of Rosenlaui, hanging down one of the combes, and occasional gigantic pinnacles of lava standing on the slope, as if arrested in a glissade. This is only the outlier of the vast region of snowy volcanic mountains from Ball-jökul far stretching south-eastward. Over the heath to the north we can see the top of the Vididal mountains and Jörundar-fell, thirty-five miles distant as the crow flies; these ranges showing quite another kind of formation and guarding in their beautiful valleys many a saga-site we have yet to visit. Down the course of the rivers flowing westward we hardly perceive the great Hvítá valley, for we are on the table land at its head: but we can just make out, faint upon the horizon, thin filmy edges of the Skessu-horn and Hafnar-fell of Borg.



## V. BORG:

### THE HOME OF EGIL SKALLAGRIMS-SON.

Returning towards the coast down the valley of the Hvítá, through country famous in Hen Thórir's saga, we come to Hvítár-vellir (White-water-fields) where the twelve-year-old Grimkel, son of Hórd and Helga of Geirshólmi, was killed in an attempt to revenge his father. In those days, the saga says, it was a poor farm; now it is one of the wealthiest in the country.



46. BÚDAR-TANGI AT THE FERRY OF HVÍTÁR-VELLIR.

Here is the ferry over the river, before it broadens into a great estuary, the Borgarfjord. To the south of this rise abruptly the snowy Skessuhorn (ogress' or giantess' peak) which also overlooks Skorradal, and Hafnarfjall (Haven-fell) with its massy flanks and gloomy recesses. To the north of the fjord the land is low and undulating, a wide stretch of swampy pasture-land known as Myrar (mires) but beset with rocky holts which break the general level of the ground like waves in a stormy sea; limited in the far distance by a range of blue mountains.

The name of Hafnarfjall, from the Hófn (Haven) at its foot, suggests that the fjord was anciently a harbour of some resort. Another landing-place was at the Búdar-tangi of Hvítár-vellir where merchants once did congregate; and about three miles farther down the right bank we come to the site of a still more interesting market place.

Gufá is a little river that winds through the holts and widens out among the mires, before it meets the salt water of the fjord. In the north of England they used to call a 'vapouring' fellow a 'guff'; and Gufa was the name of the first settler hereabouts. 'Oas' is the old name for the *mouth* of the stream flowing from Esthwaite lake: 'oyce' is not unknown elsewhere. So that Gufár-ós, like many Icelandic names, is closely akin to English, for all its strange look.





#### 47. GUFÁR-ÖS.

Here Grim from Hálogaland in Norway, the first adventurer into these parts, "took his ship up the river as far as it would go, and landed the cargo, and stayed there for a winter" (Egil's saga, c. XXVII.) Here in the early days trading ships used to be beached on the sandy shore, protected by low headlands of rock, and the booths of the traders used to be set up for their temporary dwelling place and the sale of their wares. Here Odd of Tongue "was wont to come in good time to the opening of markets, and settle the price of men's ladings, for he had the rule of the country side, neither durst any man fall to chaffer before they wotted what he would do." (Hen Thórir, c. III.) Here also Kjartan landed when he came home from Norway, and learnt the bitter news that Gudrún was married to his false friend Bolli:—

"And they went  
And found folk gathered in the biggest tent  
And busied o'er the wares, and gay enow  
The outward seeming; though ye well may know  
Folk dreaded much for all the country's sake  
In what wise Kiartan this ill news would take.  
Now Kalf had brought the gayest things to show  
The women-folk, and by a bale knelt now  
That Kiartan knew right well; and close by him  
Sat Refna, with her dainty hand and slim  
Laid on a broidered bag, her fair head crowned  
With that rich coif thereafter so renowned  
In Northland story."

(Morris, *The Lovers of Gudrun*).

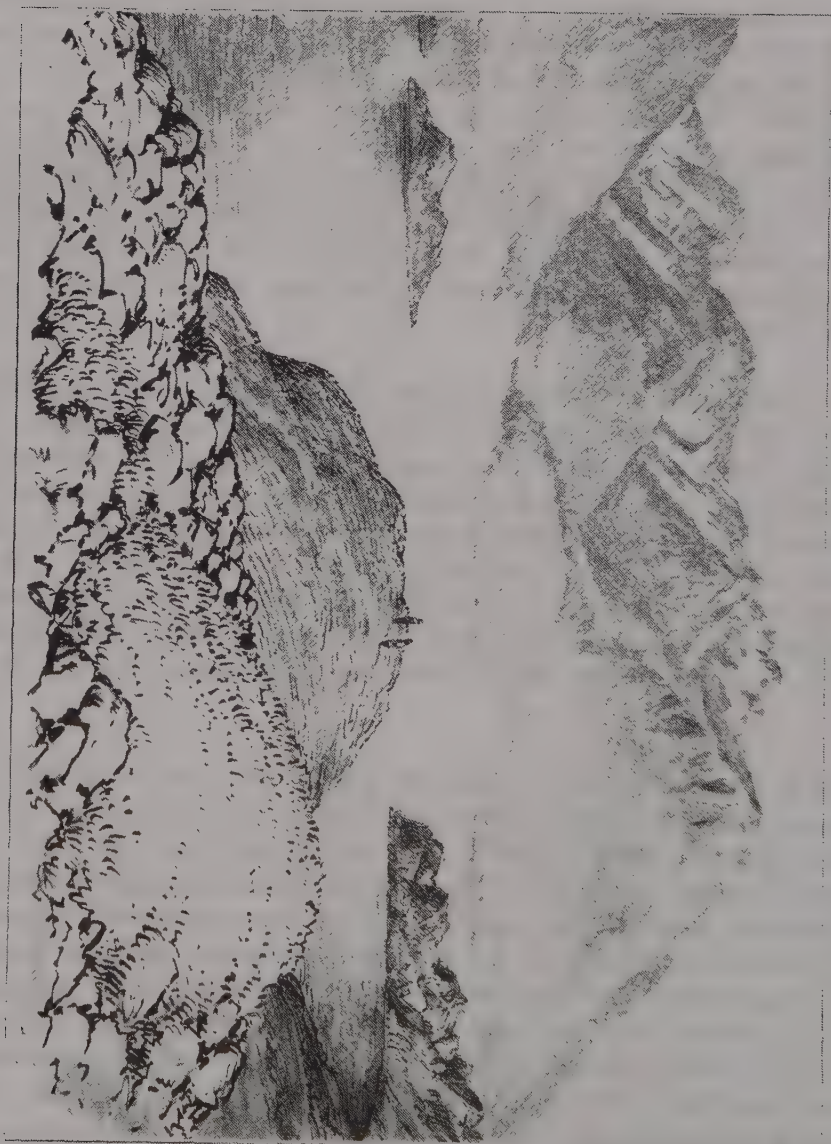
The background of this scene is there, Hafnarfjall and the fjord, lonesome and dreary now: even the actual ruins of the booths have lately been swept away by the sea.

Some three miles farther along the coast is a bolder headland, the first of a series of rocky capes which break the shore to seaward with a romantic fringe of ness and voe. When Kveldúlf, Berserk and Viking in his youth, and chieftain of Norway's king in his age, became the implacable foe of Harald Fairhair, he came out into voluntary exile, among the first to seek Iceland. He had been a mysterious character, one of those men of morbid and violent temperament about whom it was whispered that they turned into were-wolves in the dusk of the evening,—whence his name, the 'twilight-wolf.' The end of his story was in keeping with the mystery of his life. A great storm rose when he came off the west coast. His ship parted company with that of his son Skallagrim, and he fell ill. "I have never been ill in my life," said he, "but if I die, as I think, cast me overboard in my coffin, and I will yet take land to myself in Iceland. And when you meet my son, bid him build his house near me." He died, and they obeyed him. They were driven into Borgarfjord and lay to until the thick weather cleared. Then they found the coffin on the shore and buried it in a cairn on Kveldúlf's-höfði (head). Tradition still points out the rocky creek where the body was found, and the little grassy hillock on the summit of the headland is thought to be the grave of Kveldúlf.

His son Skallagrim came to the place at last, and built a house at Borg, one of the highest of the *castle*-like holts that rise above the mires. He was a great chief and settled his men on the district round; fished the teeming salmon-rivers, took seals and whales, kept flocks and herds, and sowed his acres with corn. But he was best known as a master smith; the slag heaps of his primitive bloomeries, where he smelted iron ore with the wood that then covered great part of the country, are still seen in the neighbourhood. The story of his anvil—how he rowed out by night into the fjord, and dived for a huge cobble-stone that four men might hardly lift,—may be read in Egil's saga (chapter XXX). He inherited something of his father's strange character, the Berserk rage and mystery,—and his end was no less dramatic.

His son Egil was riding off to a feast with a neighbour, and the old man, in embracing him for farewell, asked for certain treasure sent him by King Athelstan. "You shall have all the money you want, father," said the son, "but I know you have silver enough and to spare for today's needs." "Very well," rejoined the old man, in sudden mood; "and I shall do what I like with my own." At nightfall they saw him ride out with a great chest on his knees and a brazen kettle under his arm—filled with his hoards, and they watched him drop them into the bog-hole called Krumms-kelda (the spring of Thorbjorn Krumm, his retainer, who settled the land of Gufa: we found the place and sketched it: but it is a mere pit in a swamp.) In the morning he was found sitting, clothed as he had come back at midnight, on his high-seat, stark dead. They sent for his son from the feast. He came as evening fell, and not risking to approach the dangerous corpse, which might, according to pagan belief, be reanimated by a malign ghost, he came round by the passage that opened into the hall behind the high seat, and taking the body by the shoulders laid it down. Then he bade men dig straight through the turf wall, and so they carried out the corpse.

48. KVELDUF'S HEAD.







49. SKALLAGRIM'S GRAVE IN BORGAR-NES.

On Digra-nes (now called Borgarnes) they laid him in a mound with his horse and weapons and smithy tools. Some years since, the cairn was opened, and remains a shapeless ruin, from which the house and the rocky Borg behind it and distant blue mountains are seen across the voe. An old iron hammer is shown by the bóndi of Grund as the hammer of Skallagrim.

Egil Skallagrims-son, the skald and viking, who fought under Athelstan in England and faced Eric Bloodaxe and his witch wife in their palace at York, had his home at Borg. It was here he laid himself out to die after burying his best beloved son in his father's grave; and, wiled back to life again only by the cunning sympathy of his daughter, consoled himself by making the famous poem "On the Loss of his Sons" (*Sona-torrek*, Egil's saga, chap. 81). When he migrated to Mosfell his son Thorstein held Borg, father of Gunnlaug's Helga the Fair, and of many sons, ancestors of the great clan of the Myra-men.





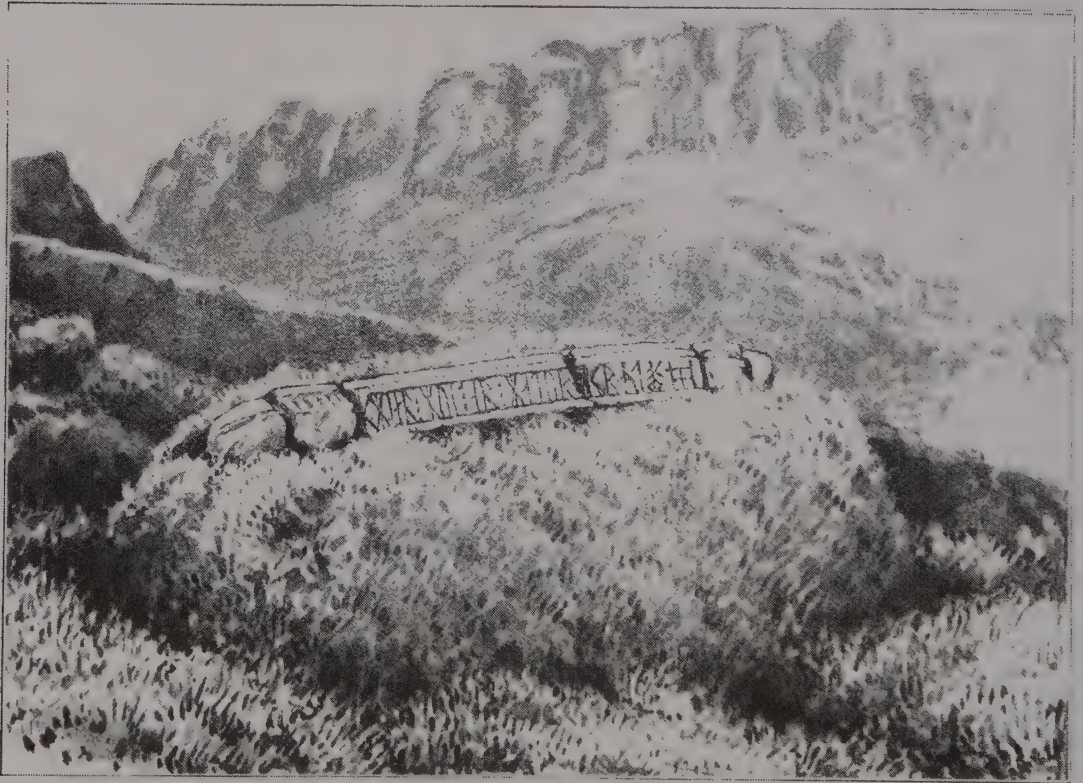






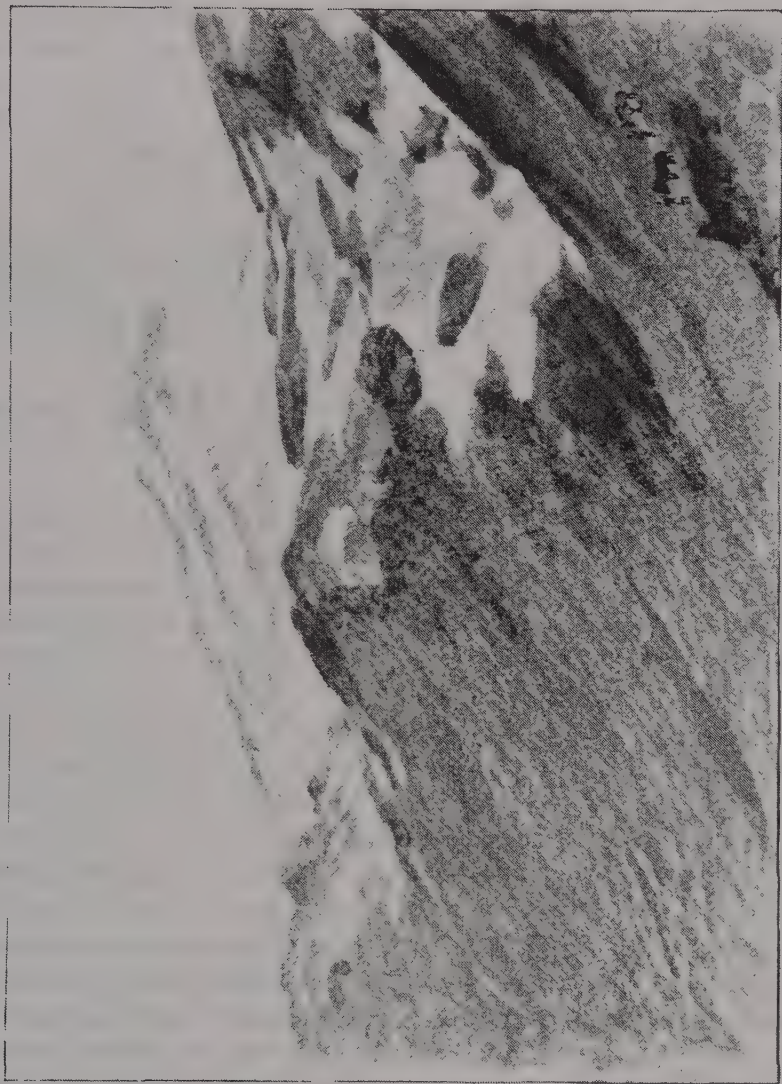


We can stand on Egil's Borg and see in the sunset to northward, above wide rolling grass land, a long range of peaks from Eiriks-jökul and Baula to Snæfell fifty miles over the bay. To the south, close at hand, rises Hafnar-fjall, steep and scarred, above the blue fjord and rocky Borgarnes. At our feet, in its rich green meadows, lies the historical homestead, still partly built of oak-beams carved and moulded in the ancient times.



51. KJARTAN'S GRAVE.

In the churchyard is the grave of Kjartan, so named by an ancient tradition confirmed by the Runic stone that lies on it, the only one in Iceland: bearing words carved by some mediæval hand, HIAR HVILAR HALUR KIARTAN OLAFSSON (the last two words in bind-runes, contracted)—“Here sleeps the hero, Kjartan, son of Olaf.”



52 THE JÖKUL FROM KAMBSKARTH.

## VI. SNÆFELLS-NES:

### THE LAND OF THE ERE-DWELLERS.

From distant Reykjavík we have seen Snæfells-jökul far over the sea, a promised land of romance; and now our pilgrimage leads us to coast round its fjords and to explore its snowy peaks and deep recesses. There is no part of Iceland more attractive to a stranger's eye. The wild volcanic grotesque is less in evidence, though here and there it crops out, sharply contrasting with more normal and more beautiful scenery of an Alpine type: and the long range of lofty and varied mountains which forms the great promontory, culminating and closing with the enormous snowpeaks of the jökul, is as full of subjects for the artist as any equal area of Switzerland or Savoy.

"*The jökul*," it is locally called; unlike most Icelandic mountains, this long extinct or dormant volcano is looked upon as a kindly creature, the home of a friendly "landwight"—inaccessible as it is—and except by the crazy foreigner unattempted. It rises on three sides from the sea to 5000 feet, a dome of crevassed glaciers overhanging the crags, heaped with virgin snow and crested with white peaks.

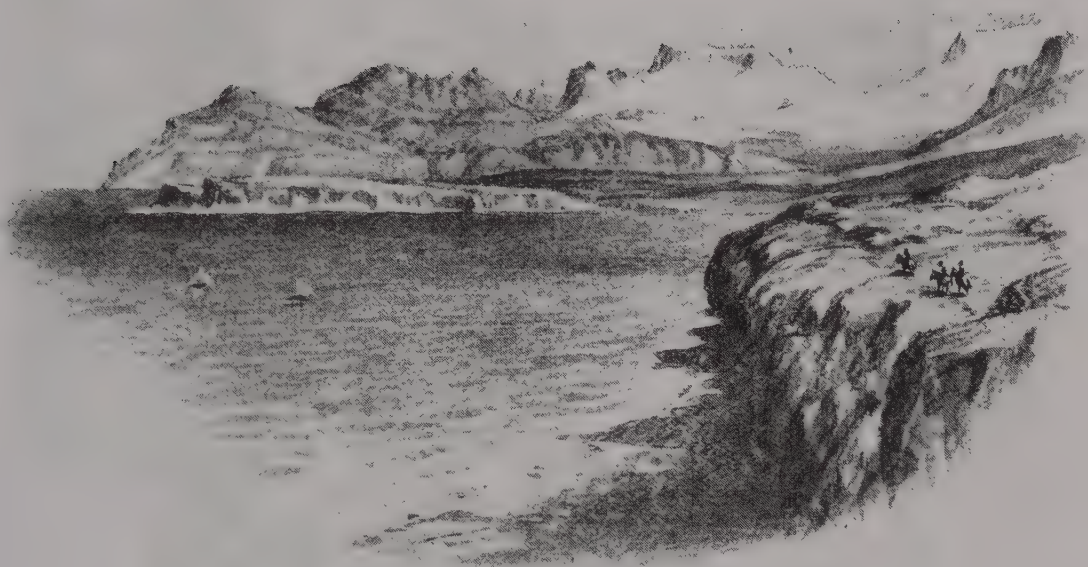
On the north side is the modern village and trading place of Olafsvík, under the precipice of Enni, along whose face winds a narrow and dangerous path, which is the only approach from this quarter to the western end of the ness.

As we ride east, the shore is bold and precipitous; the bridle path winds high above it, crosses the strange and slippery ford of a seething river whose bed is one table of flat rock, and creeps beneath a succession of ravines in the basaltic crags, wreathed with ferns and flowers and sparkling with innumerable waterfalls. In the distance are many historic sites, Fródá and Máfahlíd, under their mountains; and to the left the view is closed by the bluff of Búlands-head.

Passing for the present the gorge of Fródá, we come to a broad stretch of meadow land, with a quiet reedy tarn, set back in a bend of the lofty range of crags, which support the Alpine peaks behind and above them. There is no crossing these snowy heights. The only road follows the coast, thrust nearer and nearer to the edge, as the crags encroach upon the shore: until at the great headland a narrow path winds from gill to gill along slopes of scree between the sky wall that rises overhead and the sea-wall that the breakers beat upon below.

There was a fight once at the neighbouring farm of Mewlithe, and a Scotch thrall, Nail, fled from it panic-struck: the story is in "*The Ere-dwellers*." He ran, and scared the shepherds on these nearer slopes with the news of a defeat, and raiders at hand to massacre them all. As it turned out, Nail's master got the better of the invaders, and seizing the horses of the slain for his party, galloped after the thralls to fetch them back. They thought the enemy was upon them, and ran the harder to Búlands-head, "to that place which is now called Thrall-sceae (seen in Plate 54) and there Thórarin and his folk got Nail taken, because he had well-nigh broken his wind, but the thralls leapt over from the Head and were lost, as was like to be, because the Head is so high that whatsoever leaps thereover must perish."





53. THE COAST FROM OLAFS-VÍK.

A less tragic and much later tale tells that two farmers lived on opposite sides of the Head, father and son : and they fell out. One day they met here on the path, riding : and neither would give way to the other. Now each had leggings with silver buttons all down from knee to ankle. They flogged their horses, but said no word of greeting. Somehow they passed, and neither went down the abyss : but each found he had lost all the buttons from one side.

Just to the east of the Head stands a boulder which, when you come that way, you are told to touch, or tap with your whip-stock, for good luck in crossing the dangerous pass. Local tradition calls this rock *Thórgunna*-stein, and tells that *Thórgunna*'s coffin was rested on it, in the funeral journey to *Skálholt* (see p. 67).





54. BULAND'S HEAD.



55. MÁFAHLÍÐ (MEWLITHE).

In the green bight of meadowland between the tarn and the crags lie two farms whose names are familiar to the saga-reader.—Mewlithe (Máfahlid—pronounced Mawaleith) and Katla's Holt. At present Mewlithe is one of the prettiest of Icelandic farms, such as we suppose were more common once on a time, before all the wealthier and more cared-for houses began to be built in the ugly shanty style,—not to say, before the age of corrugated iron, which, useful as it is undoubtedly, has not yet been treated artistically. Mewlithe has a carved porch and arched doorway, and it is all covered with little scales of shingle, silvery grey. Its situation is glorious, under the crags and snowpeaks, and overlooking the tarn in the meadows and beyond them the sea to the right hand and to the left the serrated outline, pure white, of Snæfell. In the viking days it was a stirring place, the home of Geirrid the witch and her son Thórarín.

At the next farm lived another witch Katla, and her son Odd, and Eyrbyggja-saga ("The Ere-Dwellers," chapters XV-XX) tells a strange tale of the falling out between the two houses, the fight between the men, and the fierce hatred between the women.

The feud came to a hideous end. In one of the skirmishes Thórarín's wife had run in to part the fray, and Odd had struck off her hand. For this, or rather for denying the deed, they sought him at Holt. His mother cast a glamour over him. First she made them think him her distaff,—“Rock” is the Icelandic and old English word; and



when they came back they took him for a goat; and the third time "they saw nought quick save a house-boar that Katla owned, which lay under the ash-heap": but having made up their minds that the distaff had been he, they chopped it up. "Ye never need say ye came for naught," cried Katla, "ye've slaughtered my rock!" But Geirrid the witch of Mewlithe came with them the fourth time, and made short work of the witch of Holt. She "cast off her cloak and went to Katla, and took a sealskin bag which she had with her and did it over Katla's head, and then her fellows bound it fast beneath. Then bade Geirrid break open the dais, and there was Odd found, and bound sithence: and after that these twain were brought to Búlandshead." Odd was hanged and Katla stoned, "and of that tale no folk thought harm."





57. THE FRÓDA.

Retracing our steps a little we come to a tiny farm on the high banks of the river Fróda (Fródis-water of "the Ere-dwellers"; pronounce Fro-thou) near which are the ruins, measuring 82 feet by 34, of an ancient house, very famous in story.

Thórodd on a trading voyage from Dublin, had made his fortune by selling a boat to the tax-gatherers of the Earl of Orkney when they were wrecked off the coast of Ireland. He married Thurid, sister of Snorri the Priest, and settled here.

Once there came from the Hebrides an elderly woman named Thórgunna, who owned a wonderful set of English bed clothes and curtains. The mistress wanted to buy them, but Thórgunna would not sell. One day while they were haymaking, a sudden shower came on. It was a shower of blood; and the blood-drops would not dry off Thórgunna, nor her rake, nor the hay she had tossed. Then she fell ill and died, begging them to bury her at Skálholt, where the Christian church had just been established,—this was in 1001; and to burn her fine bed-clothes, so that no one might ever use them again.



The story has such a queer stamp of reality in its very want of cohesion. Why these portents, who she was, what she meant, we can hardly grasp. If we were told, it would look so much more like fiction. We feel there must be facts at the bottom of the tradition, however distorted and over-laid with folk-lore.

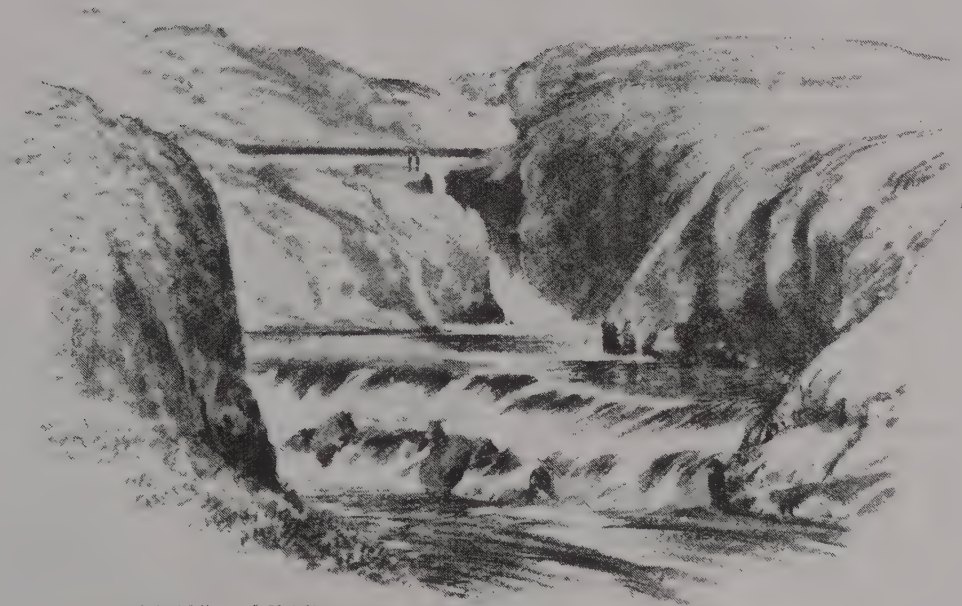
Well, Thuríd would not hear of such fine things being destroyed. She persuaded her husband to let her have them; nevertheless they took the body all the way to Skálholt and buried it there, not without a curious adventure on the way, when the dead woman came to life for a moment.

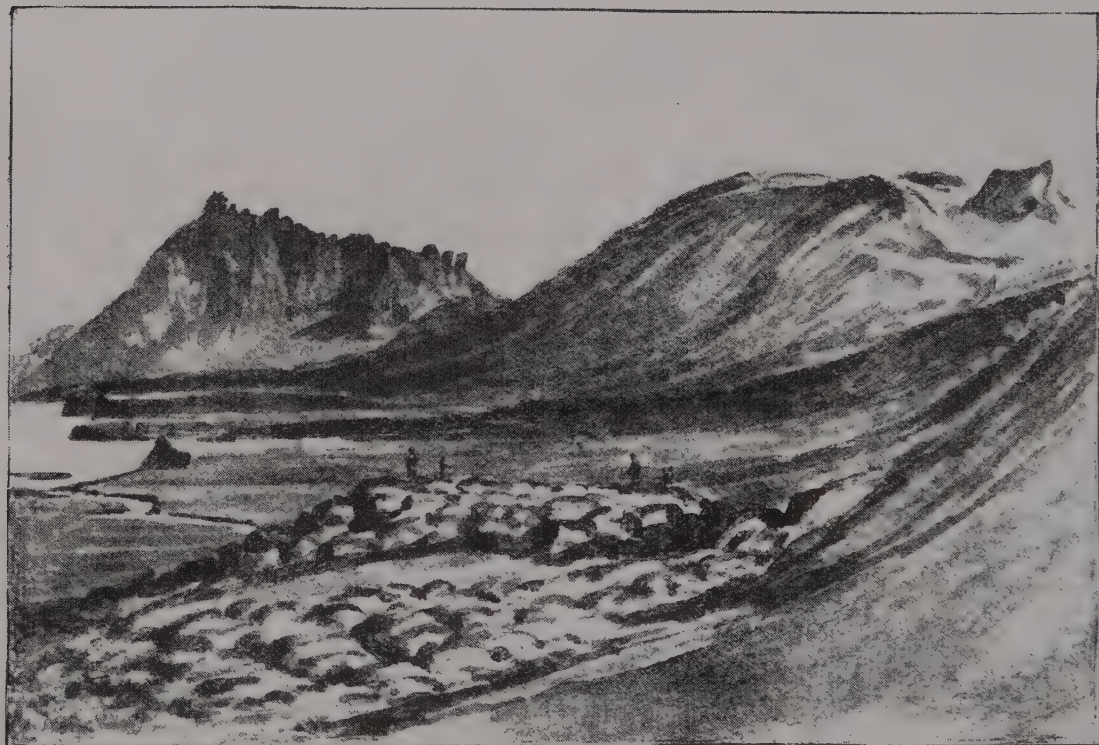
On the evening of their return, as they sat by the fire, "they saw how by the panelling of the house-wall was come a half moon, and all might see it who were in the house; and it went backward and withershins round about the house. A whole week this thing endured, that the Moon of Weird came in there evening after evening."

Then a shepherd died, and he "walked"; and so handled Thórir Woodenleg, a guest, that he died. Six other died, one by one, before Yule.

Then there were hauntings in the larder; a seal's head came up out of the middle of the floor, and would not go down. Then just before Yule, Thórodd himself was drowned with five of his men, in fishing off Enni—and their ghosts came—all dripping wet—to their own funeral feast. The household didn't mind that much:—it was thought lucky for the drowned to come to their own arvale, "for in those days" says the saga apologetically "little of the olden lore was cast aside, though men were baptized and were christian by name." But soon it came to be a regular event that the six drowned came at evening and sat by the fire, and the seven buried came to sit over against them, and shook the dirt off their grave-clothes at the drowned. "Then," says the saga, "the home men fled away from the fire hall—as might be looked for, and had neither light nor warm stones nor any matter wherewith they had any avail of the fire." The best they could do was to make fires in other rooms, and leave the ghosts in possession of the hall. At last Snorri the priest was called in: he advised them first to burn Thórgunna's bed-gear: and then to hold a regular door-doom, (the recognized court of law upon the premises) and summon each ghost by name to show cause why he disturbed decent people. Which was done on Candlemas Eve A.D. 1002, with the happiest results, quaintly told by the saga—and none the less quaint for Morris's translation. "It was done in all matter even as a doom of the Thing: verdicts were delivered, cases summoned up, and doom given. But as soon as the sentence on Thorir Woodenleg was given out, he arose and said 'Here have I sat while I might,' and thereafter he went out of the door before which of the court was not set. Then was the sentence on the shepherd passed: but when he heard it he stood up and said 'Go I now hencefrom: I ween erst it had more seemly been.' And when Thorgríma Witchface heard the doom on her ended she also arose and said 'Here while abiding was meet I abode.' Then they charged one after another, and each arose as the sentence fell on him, and all said somewhat of their going forth; but ever it seemed by the words of each that they were all loth to depart. At last was judgement given on goodman Thorodd, and when he heard it he stood up and said, 'Meseems little peace is here—so get us all gone elsewhere,'"—and so ended the hauntings of Fródá.

This is the most romantic of Iceland rivers. From a deep gorge among mountains flecked with snow the russet peat-water comes frothing over its rapids and flowing softly in eddying amber pools among beds of round white pebbles, its nearer murmur mingling with distant roar of cataracts, and the recurrent boom of breakers on the sea shore. As we trace it skywards, up the valley that grows grander and grander at every turn, past enormous waterfalls and spouts from the over-arching walls of pillared basalt, along terrible edges of precipitous ravine, towards the wild uplands on the shoulders of the mountains, with glimpses here and there of greater heights beyond, clean-cut outlines of ice and sweeps of flawless creaming jökul; and so through melting snow-patches to the cairn on the ridge of the range, commanding both seas; and down the headlong track that leads to Kamb in Broadwick; we are following a route often trodden by one of the most famous of Viking heroes, Björn the Champion of Broadwick. Over this pass, Kambs-skarth, he used to come wooing Thurid of Fródá, in spite of her husband and her still more powerful brother. One time, on his way home, he was set upon by Thórodd and his company, and not only wounded, but outlawed and banished. The chasm of Fródá over which he leapt and escaped is still shown: it is where the two figures stand in our sketch; not a jump to try in cold blood. After this he went for three years to the Jómsvikings in the





59. KAMB: RUINS OF BJÖRN'S HOUSE.

Baltic, and became famous. He wandered home at last, and the intrigue began again. The injured husband called in sorcery to his aid, and got a witch to raise such a storm that Björn was weatherbound on the pass and forced to shelter for three days in a cave, still called by his name, on the hill to the left above his leap. It is a cavern almost divided into two chambers, 20 or 25 feet high to the roof, with an entrance 5 feet high and 9 feet broad, and the remains of a fireplace in the middle of the floor.

Over this pass, and down to his home on the other side he was once pursued by Snorri the Priest and a troop of horsemen. They thought to surprise him, and found him at wheelwright's work, alone, with only a knife in his hand. He seized Snorri, held the knife-point to his breast, demanding truce, and promised to withhold himself for ever from Fróda; a promise he kept.

He left his home, and no one knew what had become of him: but years after, in some distant country of the west, an Iclander met a great chief of a strange folk, who asked many questions about home; and while denying his name, sent a ring to Thurid with the message that he who sent it was a greater friend to the mistress of Fróda than to the Priest of Helgafell.





60. SNÆFELLSJÖKUL FROM ÖXL



From Kamb it is an easy ride along the edge of high cliffs to Stapi, where are famous basalt caves facing the Atlantic. We were there at midnight, when the sun, hardly set, threw long level rays of cloud shadow from the north through the sky, passing overhead and far beyond to the southward, where they converged again in perspective on the horizon, like the *negative* of a sunrise,—the phenomenon known as “Buddha’s Rays.” A thin shower aloft was only guessed from the faint rainbow that hung across the rosy clouds. Beneath, the great promontory lay silent, with its green farms in their green fields; and the broad Atlantic swell rolled slowly in over windless Breidavík.

From Öxl (shoulder of the fell) between Kamb and Búdir we get a fine prospect of the jökul rising above Breidavík, and the flat fields called Leikskálavellir (the fields of the Playhalls,—as they might have been called in North England *laik-scales*) where great meetings used to be held for something very like the “spell and knur” matches still played by rustic teams in the North of England; a sort of trap-bat and ball. They built sheds and stayed there half a month or more. Once while a match was going on, Thórd “Wall-eye” of Knörr (the “ship”—a farm seen in the distance close under the crags) sat in a chair looking on, and spied something moving in the scarth above—“It comes up at whiles, and for certain it is somewhat quick”—but folk were too busy to mind. It was a thrall named Egil sent by Snorri to steal in at evening when the fires were lit for supper, and smoke filled the halls and trailed up the mountain side—and so get at Björn to murder him. He crept in when Thórd and Björn sat by the fire, but trod on the tassel of his shoe-tie (such were then fashionable, says the saga) and stumbled. Next morning they took him up to the pass, which is now called Egils-skarth, and slew him there.

Nearer to us—in the foreground, is a circle, thought to be merely the ruin of a sheep-fold; but on excavation by the present writers (after unsuccessful attempts upon the traditional site of Ásmund’s howe) this proved to be an interment of Viking period. Inside a stone built circular wall, 24 feet internal diameter, under the usual layer of charcoal, we found bone earth and scraps of bone, with traces of copper and iron decayed to rust, and fragments of hard wood; and under all a stone flooring. Landnámabók tells us that when Ásmund was old he lived at Öxl (the farm on this shoulder) and Thóra his wife lived there after him. It was she who built a hall across the road so that all wayfarers might find hospitality there. Ásmund was buried under a howe in a ship, and his thrall with him: but his wife heard him singing in his grave and complaining that he was thronged, for the thrall left him no elbow-room: so they opened the mound and took the thrall out, and thereafter he was at rest.

Be these legends what you will, there is the grave; there is space in the circle for a six-oared boat, which could easily be dragged up to the place—and indeed the fragments of wood may be its remains. Such ship burials were very rare in Iceland; Thorgrim in Gisli’s saga is the only other instance.

We might call Búdir the Naples of the North. Nowhere does volcanic scenery show itself less forbidding. The lava from its little Vesuvius, now extinct, is jewelled with flowers and foliage in all its quaint recesses and secret caves; and a southern aspect gives the place shelter, warmth and sunshine enough to make one forget the imagined bleakness of the "land of ice."

Búdaróss (the Oyce or River mouth of the Booths) was anciently a well known port, where Björn aforementioned landed from his voyages; and near it his brother settled at Bakki—the scene of a little comedy of battle when Snorri the priest met the Swanfirth brothers bent on overtaking the master of Bakki. They were engaged in pulling off the turf-roof of his house to get at him, when Björn of Broadwick happened to espy them aloft as he was riding to the trading place, their coloured clothes attracting his attention, and so he set upon them and saved his brother.

From Búdir the Trollkarl is conspicuous, a snowy pinnacle of the range of Snæfellsness. To the right hand of it is the Alpine pass of Arnardals-skarth, leading across to Grundarfjord. We took this pass one bright June morning, after spending some days at Búdir, where indeed weather and scenery and hospitality combined to tempt us from our self-imposed mission. It was the place to dream away the summer in. But with a friend to guide us over the fords and flats, and the bóndi from the foot of the pass to show us the way to the summit, we ventured forth, little knowing what the descent would be.

At first it was a simple ride up a steep and rough track, rising out of a deep lateral dale along the edges of cliffs from which the landscape opened out magnificently till all the coast to Stapafell and the jökul lay like a map beneath our feet. Then we got among the snow-slopes—and with good guiding struggled up to the col—above which the great pinnacle of the Trollkarl stood like a watch-tower, veiled in mist that swirled away and clung again to its crags—with shifting gleams of sunlight piercing the veil. At the col our friendly guide left us, and we plunged down the steep snow-drifts alone.

To make the crossing on foot would have been an easy matter, but the season was too early; we were the first to attempt it that summer; and our ponies, one of which knew the road as it ought to be, and objected to it in its snowed-up condition, were recalcitrant. In the intervals of the struggle—for an Iceland pony has a will of its own, and the snow was far too soft in some places and far too steep and slippery in others—we could note that the Alpine scenery was of the finest. From a lofty ridge commanding both seas and overlooking great heights like Kirkjufell as if they were toys, we came rapidly down to a deep gorge, and tried to conjecture the obliterated path across snowslopes and snowed up turmoil of tumbled rocks, keeping above the brink of the chasm, and below the impassable crags. It was lucky, in that moment, that we had not both of us the beautiful indiarubber riding boots which keep the wet out, but slide passively over crusted snow to downright perdition. There was one pair of nailed heels to hack steps for the party:—and bit by bit we made our descent good until the last drift was passed; and remounted the ponies, who joyfully and unerringly did the rest. We were received at Grundarfjord as those that had dropped from the clouds.



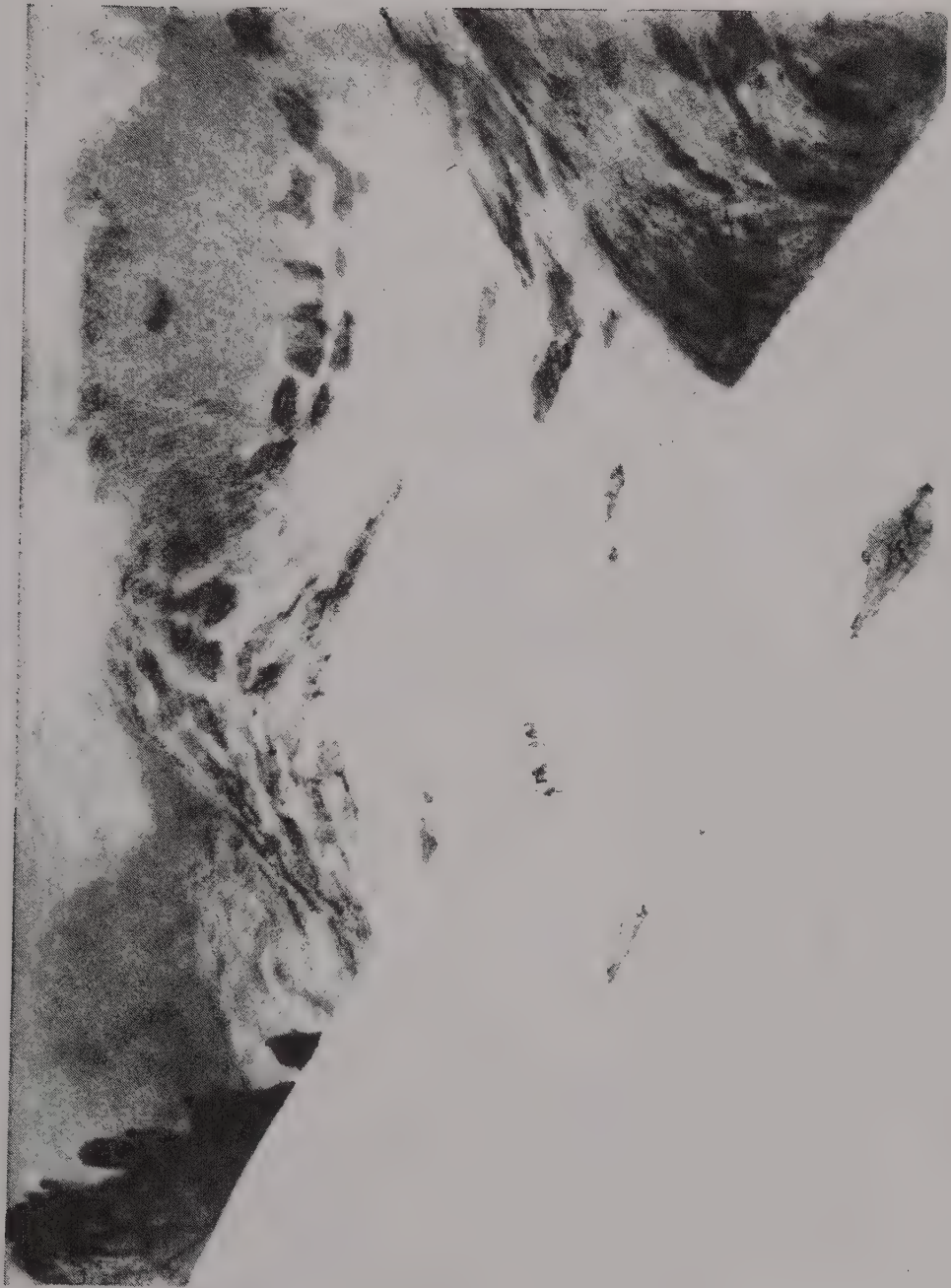








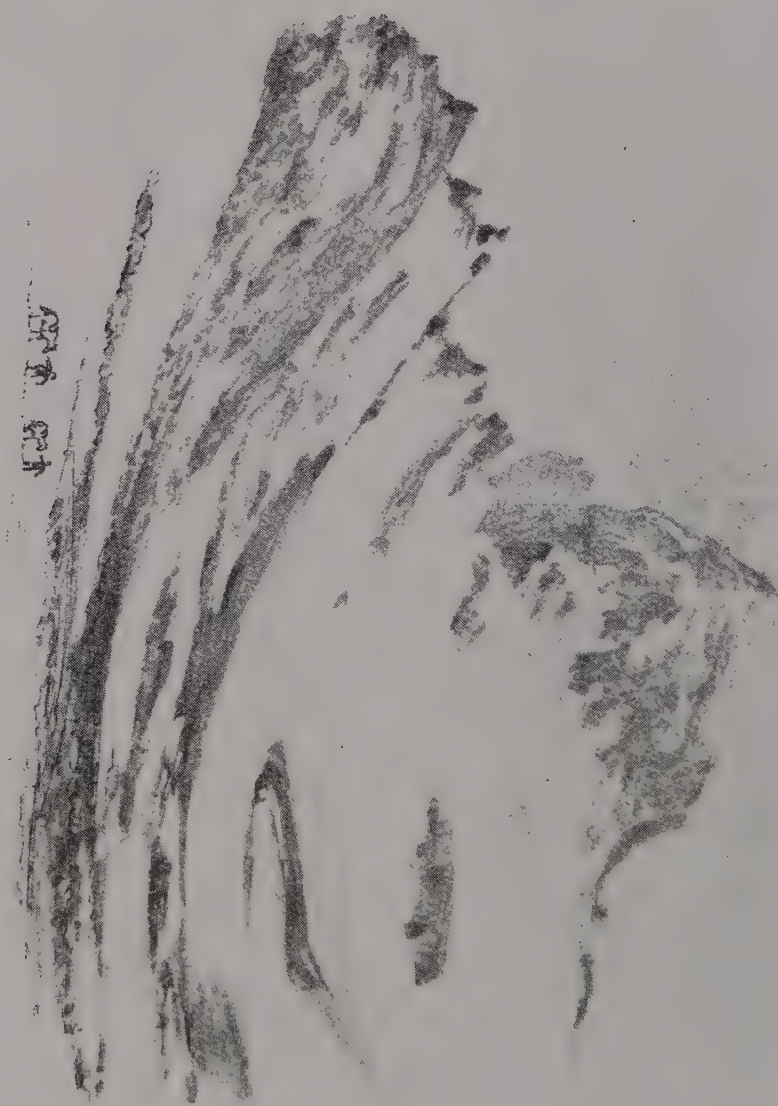












62. TROLL-KARL.



64. GRUNDARFOSS.





65. KIRKJUFELL AND STÖÐ FROM GRUNDARFJORD.

All sailors on these coasts know the Sikurtopp or Sugarloaf, as a landward signal, and Stöð, "the Coffin," long, flat summited and symmetrical, standing out in front of a mass of mountain forms; Helgrindur (Hell gates) the uncomplimentary title of a group of lofty peaks distinctly and picturesquely Alpine in character to the west of Grundarfjord, and Mön, the Mane, a crested ridge rising on the east of the fjord, and buttressing the central mass on which Trollkarl stands. The sugar-top is locally known as Kirkjufell (Kirkfell) so called even in heathen times from its shape: the vikings knew churches though they might not worship in them. It is less like a gable when seen from the farm of Grundarfjord, but even so a striking feature, hewn out of level trap-beds and seeming hardly accessible.

Whether this fine loch was the Kirkjufjord of Landnåma we must leave to scholars. Its lovely foss and varied scenery—though not mentioned in saga, must have been familiar to the actors in the drama of Eyrbyggja; for all the eastern shore is in the land of Eyr, where lived the Ere-dwellers themselves, under their chieftain Steinthór, "the third best man-at-arms of Iceland."



#### 66. HALLBJARNAR-EYRI AND KOLGRAFA-FJORD.

Hallbjarnar-eyri, the spit of land dividing Grundarfjord from Kolgrafa-fjord, is the site that gives name to the saga, though few of the incidents told in it happened here. In the distance, across Breidafjord, are the crags of Bardastrand. From the valley at the head of the loch we cross Tröllaháls, the Giants' house, often mentioned in the saga. It is by no means so fearful as its name suggests, though fine aiguilles rise above the mountain sides as we ascend, and as we come down to the next valley, Hrauns-fjord, we look up to magnificent craggy precipices down which tall waterfalls stream from the snow above to the farmsteads nestling below.

Hrauns-fjord is so called from the lava, *Hraun*, which forms part of its shore, a mass erected not long before the settlement from a small volcano hard by. The greater part of the fjord shows no volcanic character; it is a long narrow winding loch, with a look of Ennerdale about its tall continuous flanks, and dark still reaches of sheltered water. It was settled by Audan Stori, who had an Irish princess to wife, and for the space of one day a fairy horse that suddenly appeared and did marvels in harness, but at sunset vanished into the waters of the fjord.



67. HRAVNS-FJORD (LAVA-FIRTH).





68. THE BERSERKS' LAVA.

Beside the lava-field, which fills a mountain valley with a waste of black and broken slag, hardly touched here and there with faint green of moss and lichen, is a little farm on a grassy hill; about which this tale is told.

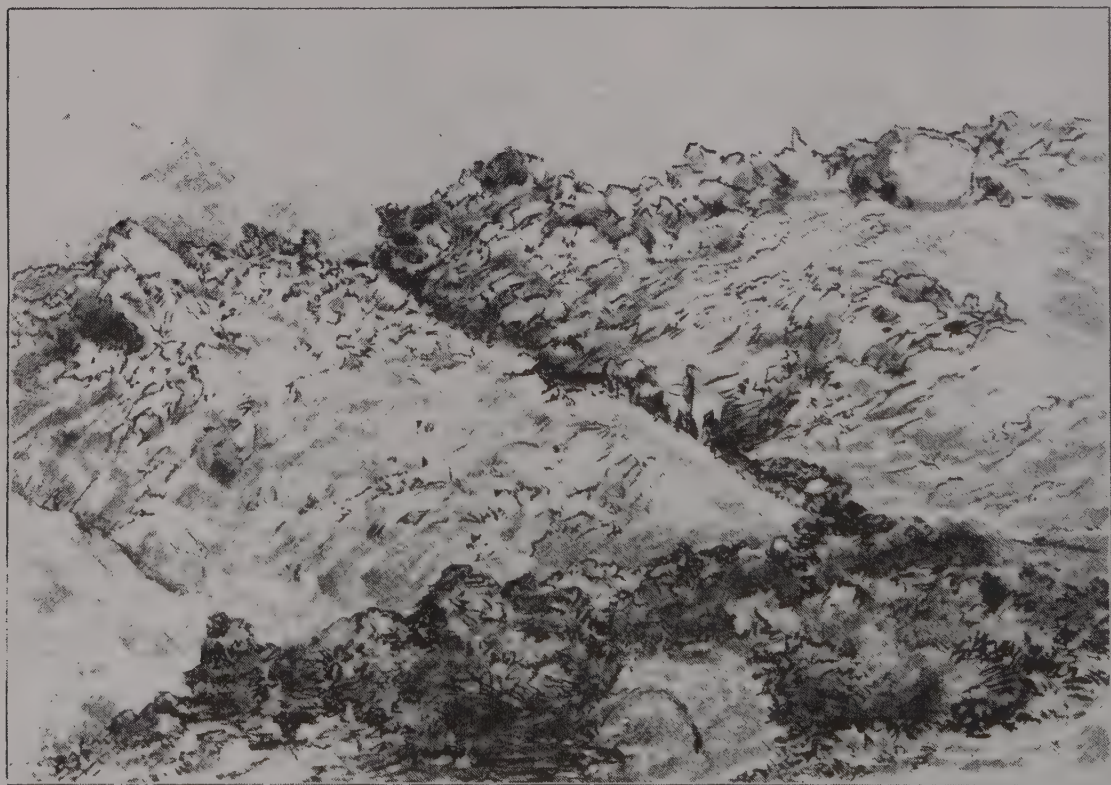
Two Swedes came out to Iceland in the train of a chief, and they were Berserks. From time to time they went mad like dogs, says Eyrbyggja, and feared neither fire nor steel. They were good at need, but ill to do with between whiles, and nobody liked to have them on his hands. At last a certain Arngrim gave them a home,—a scion of the house of Bjarnarhöfn, who had set up farming here at the edge of the lava: a big man and strong, large of nose, big boned of face, bleak red of hair, early bald in front, sallow of hue, his eyes great and fair, very masterful and exceeding in wrongfulness, —this is the sagaman's portrait painting,—therefore he was called Styr—"the Stirring."

Of course one of them fell in love with Styr's pretty daughter Asdís, but no damsel of high degree would marry a Berserk: and yet even Styr dared not say no. So he went to Helgafell for advice from Snorri the Priest, and coming back, bargained with them that they should do certain works for him and then he would think about their request.



So they reluctantly set about making him a road through the lava, and a boundary wall across it, and a 'borg' which seems to be the strong enclosure of lava blocks (called Krossfold) near the farm, intended perhaps to protect cattle. On the day when the last stone was laid Asdis met them dressed in her gayest, and sweetly listened to their songs of triumph. No wonder they were in high spirits,—but when the Berserk fit went off, it left them all foredone and weaker than common men. Then Styr asked them into his new bath-house to bathe after their toil. It was in the manner of a Roman bath, with a furnace fed from without, a hot room, more or less underground, and a little ante-room, to which steps went down through a trap door,—the bath commonly used by the vikings, and no doubt imitated from the Irish. When they were safely in the bath, Styr fed the fire till it roared again, and closed the trap-door with a raw hide and a great stone—and waited for the Berserks to be stifled. In spite of all they burst the hatchway; but one was knocked on the head, and the other thrust back into the death-trap. Then they took the bodies out and buried them "in a dale so deep that one can see nothing from it but the sky above." There is their cairn beside the path they made. Some years ago it was opened, and great bones were found in it.

And for Asdis,—when he heard the news, Snorri the priest came and married her himself.





70. BJARNAR-HÖFN.

The Berserks' road leads through the lava from Styr's Hraun to Bjarnarhöfn, the haven of Björn. He was the son of the great Ketil Flatnose, who made himself ruler of the Vikings in the Hebrides in the later part of the 9th century. This independence vexed King Harald Fairhair, who drove Björn from Norway in punishment for his father's treason. When Björn came to Scotland he found that his friends had become Christian, and in the disgust of a sturdy heathen, took ship for Iceland. To him soon after came his sister Aud, widow of Olaf the White, King of Dublin, and stayed at Bjarnarhöfn for a winter, before seeking lands of her own.

Björn was father of Kjallak, ancestor of the great family of the Kjalleklings. There is no tradition of the exact site of his Borgarholt—the rocky hill where he built his 'burg' of turf and wood: but hereabouts he dwelt among the fields that slope from the frowning fells to the rocky shore, looking eastward over multitudinous islets and headlands of Thorsnes. To the north, across Breidifjörð, rise the distant summits of Bardastrand, and behind, the snow peaks of the backbone of Snæfellsnes.



Near the substantial modern homestead is a little church with a pretty interior of carved wood, and tablets to the memory of departed Hjalteins.

On the shore are the remains of two ancient docks or boathouses. One, lying close beneath the homestead and called Hamars-naust (the boathouse of the "hammer" or rocky headland) measures 27 feet long with a breadth varying from 9 to 11 feet. It is built of massive lava blocks with a floor sloping downward below highwater mark, so that a large boat could be easily docked, and would stand out of water between tides.

The other *naust* is shown in the previous view (No. 70). It measures 25 to 30 feet in breadth, and being at the side of the bay is sheltered from prevailing winds. Close above it are the ruined booths (the largest measuring 45 by 25 feet) of an ancient trading place.



71. HAMARS-NAUST.

## VII. THORS-NES :

### ROUND ABOUT HELGAFELL.

This, even more than Thingvellir, is the saga-pilgrim's classic ground. Its associations are richer even than those of Lythend : its history is fuller and more varied than any other Icelandic neighbourhood. In the earliest days of the Norse settlement it grew at once to great importance as a place of worship and assembly, and throughout all the heroic age it maintained its position as the central Thingstead of the West country, the wealthiest and the most stirring region of Iceland. Later on, it was famous for its monastery, in which, perhaps more than anywhere else, the saga traditions were kept alive, collected and written down. The ruling families were always famous, from Thórólf Mostbeard to Snorri the Priest, and from Guðrún to her great-grandson Ari Fróði ; and they were connected with so many noble houses that hardly any story of the tenth and eleventh centuries omits mention of the Thorsnessings among its *dramatis personæ*.

At the present day it is little visited by tourists, and yet easily within their reach. Leaving Reykjavík by steamer at night, the next morning one reaches the port of Stykkishólm where comfortable headquarters may be had at the little hotel. Helgafell is within a five miles' walk over the moor ; and the whole round of Thorsnes can be made in one day on pony-back without fatigue. Our map, based, as all maps of Iceland are, on the great survey of 1844, gives a few additional details and shows the sites more distinctly than is possible on the very minute scale, nearly eight miles to the inch, of the original.\*

Three miles or so across the bay from Bjarnarhöfn lies Kongsbakki (king's-bank), which as we saw it and sketched it, in fortunate sunshine, bringing out the blue of sky and sea against the grass-grown emerald of the turf walls, may stand for type of the older Icelandic farms. The chance grouping of the many outbuildings, the absence of formality and conscious architecture, and the evident cosiness of the place, make it perfect in picturesqueness. Indoors they have the old handloom at work, and all the ancient rural life in being,—not without progressive civilization : for at our visit the Parish Council was sitting in one of the rooms, and the Councillors' ponies stood hobbled by the tún-garth.

There are few places hereabouts that are not historical sites,—saga-steads. Kongsbakki is identified with the Bakki where lived Thormód brother of Steinthór of Eyr. How it came by any connection with royalty we cannot explain. But hither, on a day, arrived Steinthór on his way home afoot after shipwreck at the mouth of Vigrafjord (the Swordfirth of "the Ere-dwellers.") Just before Yule he determined to fetch the wrecked boat home. With seven men he started early one morning and sailed to Bakki. He got his brother to join him, and they walked on the ice up Hofsvog, and over the isthmus to Vigrafjord. They got the wrecked boat and lightened it of oars and deck, which they left, with their heavier clothes and weapons ; dragged the boat over the ice all the way they had come, and went back for the things they had left.

\* In the map, for *Hofsvik* read *Hofsvog*—"Templewick" is, however, the name more familiar to English readers.



73. KONGBAKKI.





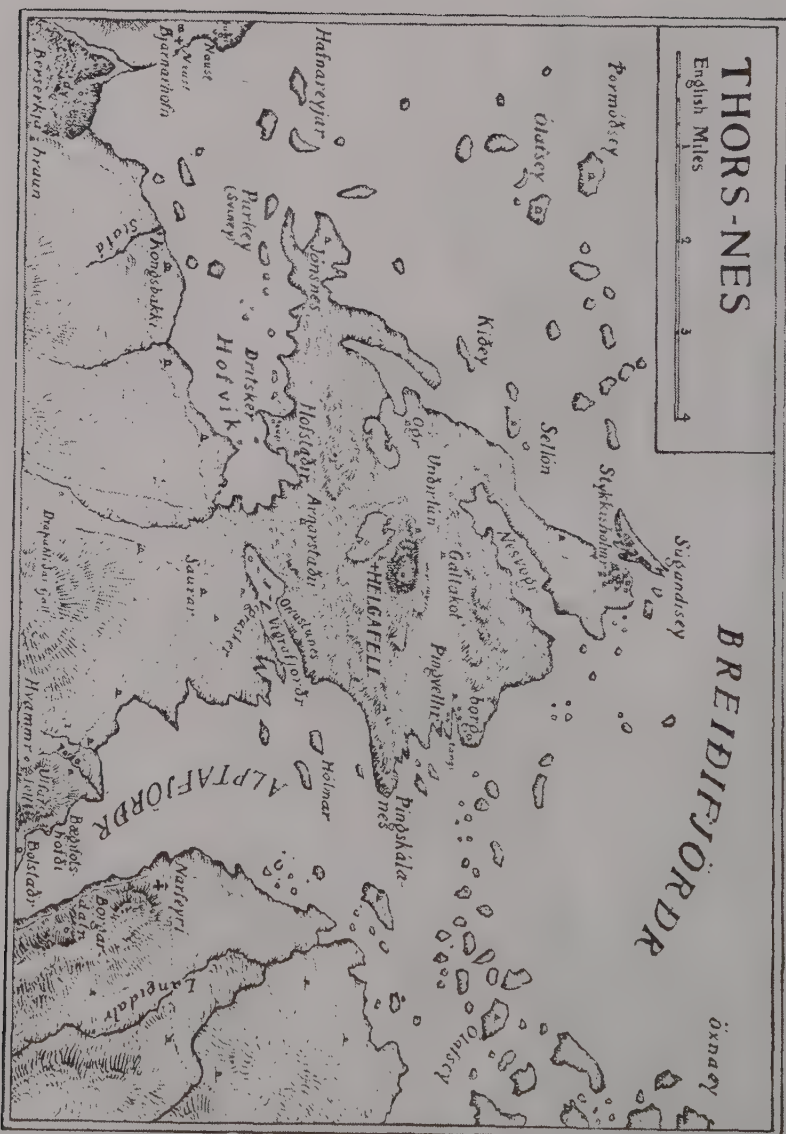




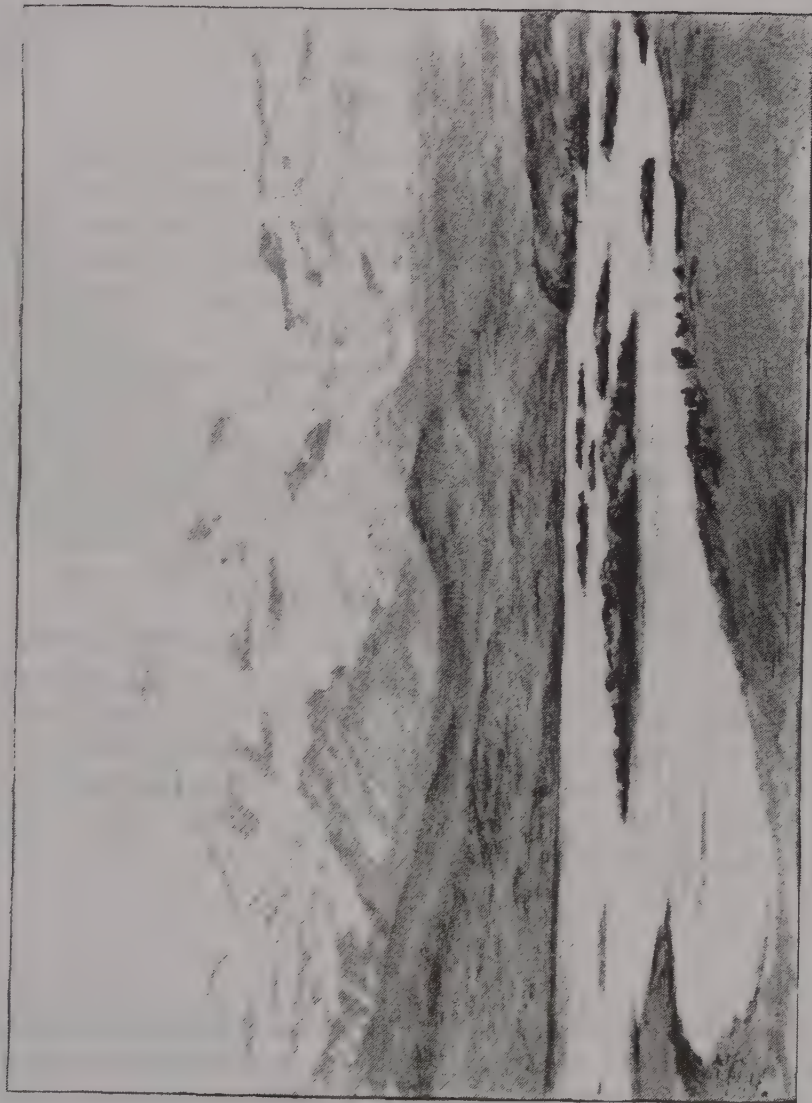
## English Miles



BREIDFJÖRÐUR



72. MAP OF THORSNES.



74. VIGRAFJORD FROM THE "ONBRENTS."

But on the way they met a party going to Helgafell for the Yule-feast: they were Thorsnes folk, with whom the family of Eyr were at feud: and they held it for granted that the Eyr men were bent on mischief. So they took up their stand on a skerry, from which the ice sloped down on every side—the tide being out, and attacked the passing Eyr-folk with spearshot. Then followed the famous battle (described at length in “the Ere-dwellers,” chapter XLV.) in which Steinhór of Eyr did three things at once—shielded a friend, wounded a foe, and avoided the spear-thrust of another, all in the same moment, on the slippery ice banks of the skerry.

It was after this fight that such rough surgery was done on the wounded at Helgafell. “Snorri Thorbrandsson sat at table by his namesake that evening. They had curds and cheese for supper”; but Snorri the priest noted that he made but little play with the cheese, and asked why he ate so slowly. “Lambs can’t eat when they are gagged,” said he; and then they found he had a broken arrow sticking through his throat. “Then Snorri the priest took pincers and dragged the arrow away; and after that he ate.” His brother Thorodd, who had not thought it worth while to mention that his breeches were nailed to his leg by a spear, and let the thrall tug at them till he found it out, was also one of Snorri’s patients. But when the wound at the back of his neck was healed, he could not get his head straight. He complained that Snorri’s surgery would maim him for life, and wanted to have “the wound ripped and the head set righter.” Snorri said it would come straight when the sinews knit, and so it did: but “he could not bend it much, after that, and Thorleif Kimbi went on a wooden leg for the rest of his life.”

They must have been in fine condition, those fighting men, to give and take blows like this. The wonder is that after all so little damage was done. It was partly because their weapons were poor, partly because they survived wounds that would have killed men of less athletic habits and less cleanly living. Simple fare, continual exercise and frequent bathing kept them always in training. And out of this warlike, stirring age grew the school of realistic literature which has left us record not only of their heroism but of all the ins and outs of home life—so unexpected and so strange.

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And here, we can see the very spot, from the Ox-brink where Snorri’s shepherd watched the fight:—Vigraffjord coming in from the left hand, a long and narrow voe rather than fjord; Orrustunes (Orrest—the same name we have near Windermere) and the Vigra-skær, the “skerry of spears” just off it, at half-tide, surrounded by banks of brown seaweed over which the ice sloped that Christmas Eve: and beyond, Grimsfell still carrying its load of winter snow. A little to the right hand the fjord ends; and the low isthmus over which they dragged their boat separates it from the twin voe of Hofs-vog (Temple-voe).



75. WHERE THÓRÓLF MOST-BEARD'S HIGH-SEAT PILLARS LANDED:

On the north side of the Hofsvog is Hof-stadir, Temple-steads, the home of Thórólf Most-beard from Norway, first settler of this part of Iceland. He arrived A.D. 884 and like other adventurers threw overboard his high seat pillars, carven with Thor's image, to drift ashore and guide him to his destined home. The exact spot where they landed is traditionally pointed out, and shown in our sketch: it could hardly be far away from this, because Thórólf's oath was to build a temple to his god at the place his god showed him.

Close by stands the present farm on the site of the ancient hall. There are no ruins, as elsewhere, of a temple, though this was the most important of all Icelandic temples; its apse and altar, the images of the gods and the ceremonies of worship are described at length in "The Ere-dwellers." The late Sigurd Vigfússon, brother of the Oxford Iclander, thought



that a low stone and turf wall, shown in plate 76, was part of the temple garth and that the actual site of the building had been carried away by the encroachment of the sea on the low shore. But this would give a mean and unsuitable position for so great a place; exposed to surf at high tides, and (even allowing for the encroachment at the greatest possible rate) so close to the water's edge as to allow of no approach from that side.

In 1896 the farmer rebuilt his house, and discovered, on the side of it shown in this picture, charcoal and great stones as of a foundation for some wall much more important in its structure than a túngarth or any ordinary farm buildings. The part of the tún or home-field seen in this sketch to right of the farm, between it and the distant top of Helgafell, is known as Kirkju-flöt, Kirk-field.



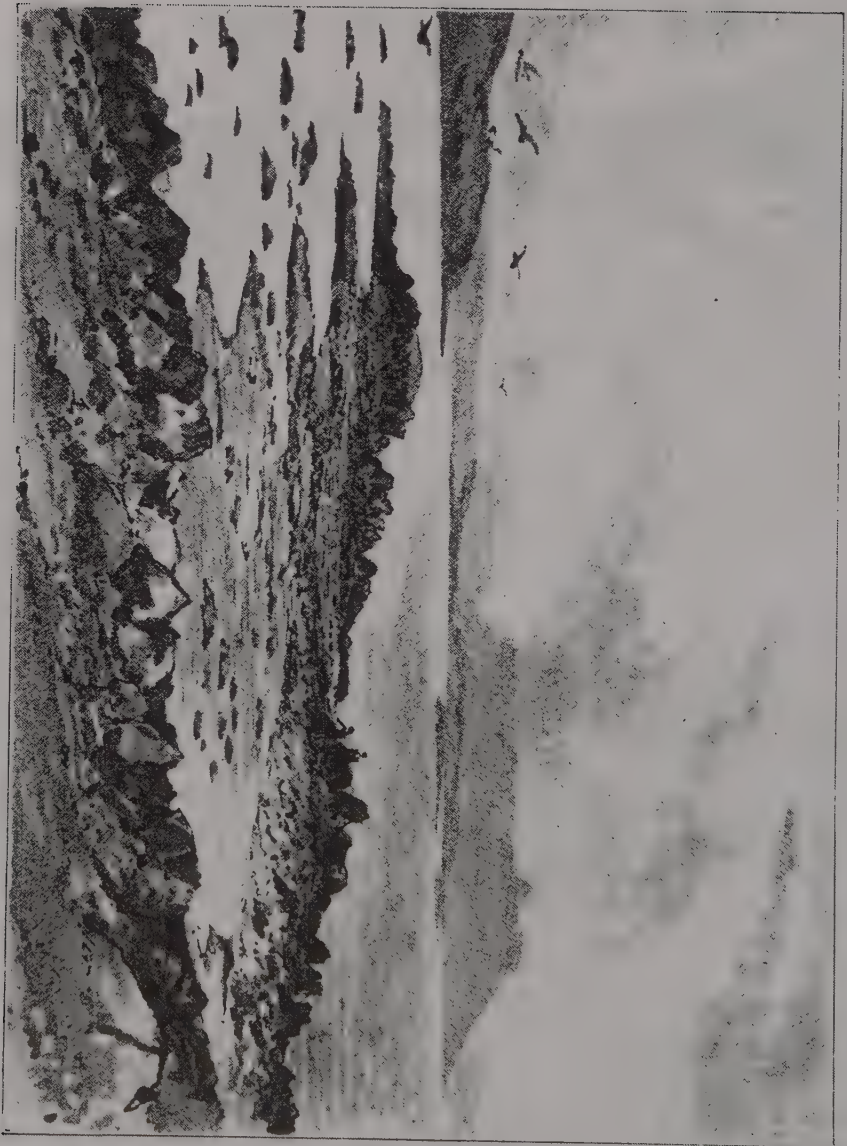
76. HOF-STADIR FROM THE SHORE: LOW TIDE.



77. HOF-STADIR FROM THE NORTH.

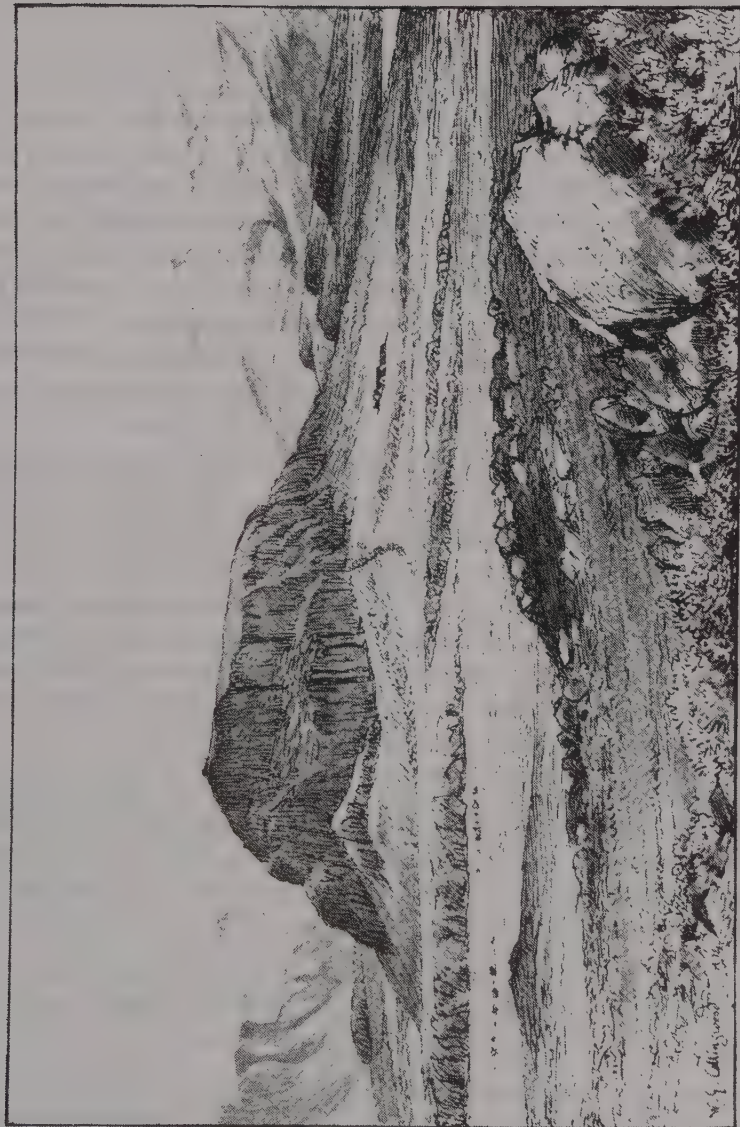
Going up to the house from this last point of view, and a little beyond it in the same direction, we can look back and see the Kirk field now on the left hand; and its suitability as a temple site becomes apparent. On the top of a little hill, surrounded by fairly level meadows, commanding a fine panorama of the range of Snæfells-nes and the sea, this spot seems in every way to meet the requirements of the great place of worship, and not only of worship but of assembly,—the Thingvellir of the populous West, before the founding of the central Thingvellir. The absence of visible remains can be understood when it is remembered at how early a date this temple and thingstead were abandoned.

Thórólf was of all heathens most pious, and would not have his temple nor the neighbourhood of it defiled with bloodshedding nor any kind of defilement. Nothing that might offend the gods could be done nearer than the Dritsker, a skerry lying out a few hundred yards to westward in the voe. But after he was dead, Thorstein his son called Thorskabit (The Cod-fisher) was not so strong a man. The folk from Alptafjord revolted against the strictness of the temple rules, and there was a battle in which neither side got a victory, but the place was at last desecrated with bloodshed. So about A.D. 935 the temple was moved to Helgafell, and the Thingstead to a new spot on the opposite side of Thorsnes, as the whole peninsula was called.



78. DRITSKER.





79, HELGAFELL.



"On the ness," says the saga, "is a fell, and that fell Thórólf held in such worship that he laid down that no man unwashed should turn his eyes thither, and that nought should be done to death on that fell, either man or beast, until it went therefrom of its own will. That fell he called Holy-fell (Helga-fell) and he trowed that hither he should fare when he died, and all his kindred from the ness." He is a most curious study, this rough heathen, with his absolute faith in unseen powers and reverence for the very stones of the soil in the land of his adoption, his intense love of order and scruples of cleanliness, the humanity that made him assign a sanctuary for all hunted creatures on the holy hill where, some forewarning told him, he and his should dwell for ever; neither the Valhöll of the pagans nor the Heaven of the Christians, but a sure abode to which his own God had guided him, a house of the other life, not made with hands, but in its rock walls and ridged roof a magnificent counterpart of those shrine-tombs reared in many lands to the heroes of the north. Thórólf is quite unique in history; but we can perhaps follow the working of his mind, granting the honesty of his beliefs, and perceiving the logic, sound as far as it went, with which he reasoned to his conclusions. We can at any rate admire the force of a character which imposed its own code and creed upon a turbulent race, unaccustomed to obey or to revere, in a transition age of new departures and in a twilight time between old faiths and new.

He had been some years dead, and the temple had been moved to Helgafell, where Thorstein his son reigned in his stead, a young man of twenty-five years. "On an evening of harvest (in A.D. 938) a shepherd man of his fared after his sheep north of Holyfell: there he saw how the fell was opened on the north side (the steep and seamy rock wall shown in our picture) and in the fell he saw mighty fires, and heard huge clamour therein, and the clank of drinking horns: and when he hearkened if perchance he might hear any words clear of others, he heard that there was welcomed Thorstein Codbiter and his crew, and he was bidden to sit on the high seat over against his father." Next morning came the news that Thorstein and his crew were drowned.

After Thorstein's death his son Thorgrim kept the temple, when he came of age. He married the sister of the famous Gisli Súrsson, and was slain by Gisli at the age of twenty-five. His posthumous son, another Thorgrim, was sent away to fostering, when his mother married again, and the people who brought him up called him Snorri, from his *sharp* wits and temper.

It would be a long story to tell how he came by his own; but in the end he settled at Helgafell as chieftain and temple priest, with his mother to keep house for him, and an uncle to manage the farm, and a great throng of retainers.

There for twenty-eight years (980-1008) he ruled the country side, with an iron hand, as they say, in a velvet glove; the cleverest and ablest man of his age: sometimes, no doubt, in the wrong, oftener in the right; unscrupulous in his means, but right-minded and far-seeing in his aims; keeping as far as possible fair order in the rough country and among the rough neighbours over whom he had to rule: and when the moment came for the great decision between pagan disorder and Christian civilization, throwing

in his influence on the right side, with a shrewd word and the influence of common sense: a man that Carlyle would have delighted to portray; the sort of man that English folk, in spite of some qualms of conscience, never tire of worshipping.

He had not been a Christian before the general change of faith: but he accepted the position loyally, threw down his temple, and built a church. A few years later, Guðrún, the heroine of William Morris's well-known poem, wearied of her home and its painful associations: she asked Snorri to change lands with her: and he complied.

Soon after Snorri left Helgafell the church was burnt down; he joined with Guðrún in building another. After a while that too was burnt: these little wooden churches, with continual candle-burning, must have been always in danger of fire. Thorkel, Guðrún's fourth husband, went to meet a cargo of timber from Norway to build a new church. In the evening she was standing at the lychgate of the churchyard and saw him, tradition says, dripping wet, at the door of the house: and before long came the news that he had been drowned.

In her widowhood she devoted herself to religion, becoming the first nun in Iceland, and studying Latin to sing the Psalms. She used to pray at nights in the church; and once dreamt that a woman,—by her look a witch of the old heathen times,—came and reproached her for disturbing her repose by praying over her tomb,—“And I would do thee a harm,” she said, “only I think better of thee than most folk.” Guðrún had digging made in the spot where she was used to kneel, and found bones, and magic things that had been buried with the corpse.

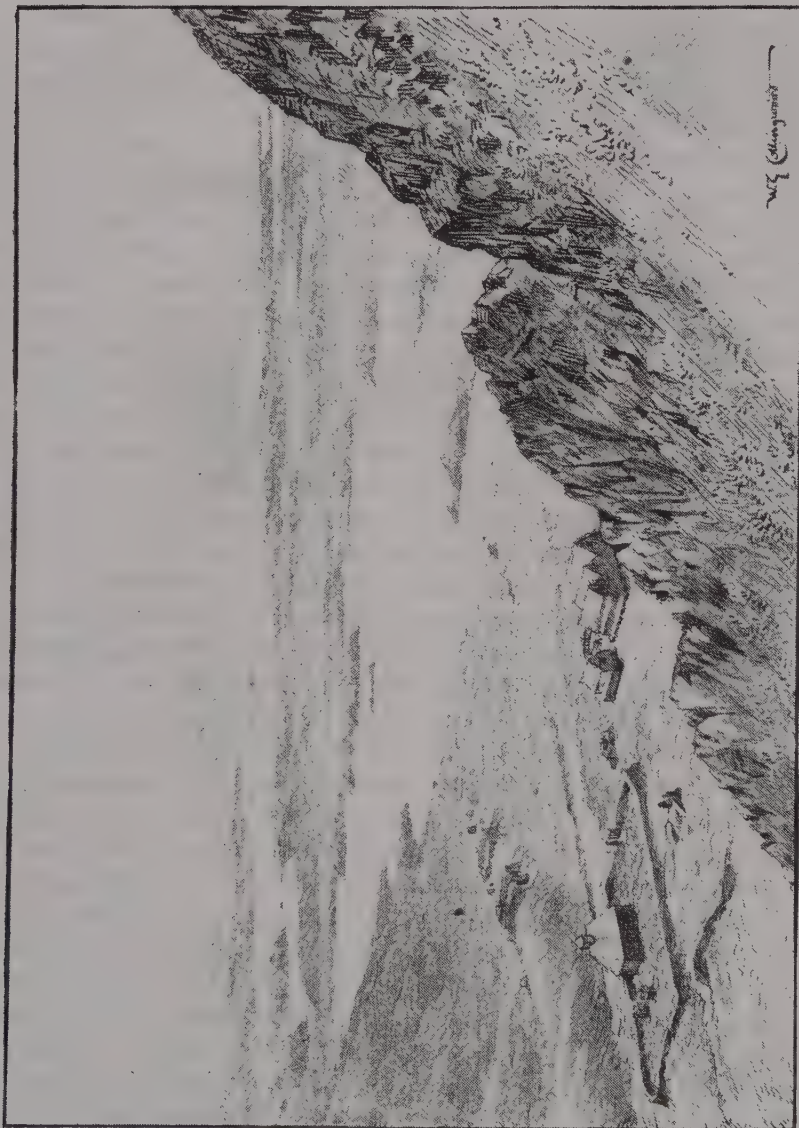
The reader may make what he likes of these waifs of folklore, remembering how universal are the beliefs they represent. Most of these stories have their counterpart in English country villages and in the traditions of our history. Their occurrence by no means invalidates the rest of the tale; indeed in a way strengthens its credibility, for no one in later ages, inventing a legend, would tack on such difficulties gratuitously. The modern Icelanders refuse to admit a belief in these old world superstitions: like the country people in England they profess to know nothing about such things: but now and again ghost stories crop up, showing that human nature has changed less in a thousand years than we sometimes fancy.

It was at Helgafell that Guðrún gave the famous answer to her son, describing her lovers, and—“I did the worst to him I loved the most.” Here she died in extreme old age. Her grave is doubtfully pointed out—a mound of turf, 11 feet by 5, lying N.E. and S.W. just outside the modern churchyard, (seen with two figures standing by it in the view from Helgafell, plate 80). The present writers excavated it and found an undoubtedly ancient tomb, built of masonry; the upper courses overhanging so as to form a vault. There was the layer of copsewood charcoal and the small gravel which characterize graves of the Viking age in Iceland, below which were fragments of bone and grave earth. It seemed to have been disturbed at some distant period and there were no valuable relics; perhaps none should be expected in a Christian grave. Fragments of iron and a banded bead were all that a careful examination disclosed.

81. GUÐRÚN'S GRAVE.







80. THE CHURCH, ETC. FROM THE SIDE OF HELGAFELL.



Lately in digging near the farmhouse, the present holder of the place has found remains of an ancient stone wall, perhaps part of the old hall, and heaped against it a number of stone hammers, great and small, made of lava pebbles from Hraunsfjord beach. The smaller hammers are such as are still used for pounding ríklíng, the dried fish of Iceland: the larger are very heavy tools.

Round Gudrún at Helgafell cluster many names famous in northern history. Her last husband, Thorkel, was son of Thord Gellir, who was the son of Olaf Feilan (the Irish *Faelan*, wolf-cub), who was son of Thorstein the Red, whose parents were King Olaf and Queen Aud of Dublin. Gudrún and Thorkell had a son named Gellir, whose grandson was Ari the historian, born here in 1067.

Gudrún established the monastery of Helgafell, which developed into a famous double community of monks and nuns, celebrated for literature and arts. There are still vague scandals current about nuns drowning babies in the tarn, and monks hung between the rocks of the Munkaskarth. But now the very site of the cloister is hardly traceable.

Looking down from the holy hill we see beneath us the modern church, representing the christian foundation which replaced the heathen temple removed hither from Hofstadir; and close to it the farmhouse which is all that is left to represent the great hall of Thorstein and Snorri and Gudrún. Beyond is the tarn, and behind that, to the left, is Temple-voe, and on its banks—a dot in the distance—the house of Hofstadir. Across the Hraunsfjord (Lavafirth) is Bjarnarhöfn, with the Berserks' lava and Tröllaháls to the left, and the Eyr of the Ere-dwellers to the right. From the ancient bield on the top, where Snorri so often gave counsel to his friends, we can overlook to eastward the site of the newer Thorsness-thing on its three promontories against the blue of Breidifjord.

At the newer Thorsness-thing, says "the Ere-dwellers":—"There is yet to be seen the Doom-ring where men were doomed to the sacrifice. In that ring stands the stone of Thor over which those men were broken who were sacrificed, and the colour of the blood on that stone is yet to be seen."

The stone is there, a glacial boulder standing four feet above the ground; and upon it here and there a brown stain which may have been what the saga-man saw: not of blood, but of iron in the stone. Whether men were ever sacrificed here is doubtful, in spite of the word of the ancient writer. Human sacrifice was no doubt a part of the old pagan religion, but there are no records of it in Iceland, and it is quite against analogy if we imagine a conclave sitting round an altar, and enjoying the shrieks of the victim. The more we get to know of the real manners and customs of the 10th and 11th century Icelanders, the more we find them like ourselves, and unlike the races which enjoyed cruelty and flourished in crime. They liked fighting, and carried out a vendetta to the bitter end,—but not for the sake of slaying, and still less of torturing. Abroad, in viking cruises, they robbed and massacred hereditary foes, but with less ferocity than their foes put to their account; though now and then, as in all wars, there were atrocities, unnecessary and inexcusable. Here perhaps there may have been some tradition of human sacrifice to justify the saga-man: but there is not a morsel of evidence that it was part of their system of law and religion after settling in Iceland.



## 82. THE ALTAR OF THOR.

The saga says that the Stone stood "in the Ring." If we read "near the Ring" the passage makes sense. No stones of any kind stand close to the altar stone, nor are there any buildings which could have been made by removing the circle. It may, of course, have been merely a ring of turf seats, but this is unlikely. We dug trenches radiating from the Thor's stone, and found that there was nothing in the soil to indicate a ring mound, nor any stones sunk in the rather swampy earth.

There is however a small stone circle about 100 yards due east of the altar, on the point of a ness called Litli Tangi (Little Tongue). Four ruins of booths lie between the stone and the circle, and the sea has somewhat encroached upon the shore. This circle is thought in the neighbourhood to be an old fold: but it is hardly the place to drive sheep into: and the "old fold" theory, as in so many other cases, need not be given much weight. We suggest that this was the Doom Ring, like the Lögrétta at the Althing, where the Council sat retired, out of hearing of the crowd.



83. BOOTH-RUINS AND CIRCLE ON LITLI TANGI, THORSNESS-THING.

(The figure in the distance stands by the Altar stone).





84. THORSNESS-THING FROM THINGVALLA-BORG.

(Half tide.)

By climbing a ridged promontory to the north of this we get a general bird's eye view of the whole site from a spot named Thingvalla-borg. Helgafell rises in the distance to the right, Vigrafjord runs to the left beneath the mountains of Alptafjord. The ruins of a stone building are seen in the foreground,—the "borg"—not named in the sagas and unexplained in any tradition.

Beneath are the three nesses of the Thingstead: the farthest is Litli Tangi with the Circle and Stone of Sacrifice; the nearest is Thingvalla-tangi on which was the Thingbrekka, or hillside for the general meeting, with two ruins of booths upon it. At the head of the little voe which separates this from the next, Húsa-tangi, is the modern farm. On Húsa-tangi are a great many ruins, the largest booth measuring 44 feet in length and 12 in width inside the walls, which are 8 feet in thickness. A smaller apartment, an outhouse or "afbúd", is seen adjoining the greater hall, which suggests that this may be actually Olaf Peacock's booth, of which the story is told in Kormak's saga as follows.



"Spring slipped by, until it was time for the Thorsness-thing; and Fighting Bersi came to the meeting when most folk were already there. He went to the booth of Olaf Peacock of Herdholt, who was his chief. It was crowded inside, and Bersi found no seat. He was used to sit next his friend Thórd (with whom he had quarrelled) but that place was taken. In it there sat a big and strong-looking man, with a bear-skin coat and a hood that shaded his face.

"Bersi stood before him a while, but the seat was not given up. He asked the man for his name, and was told he might call him Bear, or he might call him Shady, whichever he liked: whereupon he burst into rhyme:—

- 'Who sits here unseemly  
Happed in bear-skin grimly?  
Friends, amid ye feasting  
Fell-wolves have ye guesting?  
Now I know him! said he  
Name me Bear, or Shady?  
Morn shall make it plainer;  
Maybe prove him—Steinar:

—and it's no use for thee to hide thy name, thou in the bear-skin.'

"'No more it is,' said he. 'Steinar I am, and I have brought money to pay thee for Kormak,—if so be it is needed. But first I bid thee fight.' Bersi agreed to fight him, and then went out to the outhouse, 'afbúd', and took up his abode there.

"One day the word went round for bathing in the sea. Said Steinar to Bersi 'Wilt thou try a race with me, Bersi?' 'I have given over swimming,' said he, 'and yet I will try.' Now Bersi's manner was to breast the waves, and to strike out with all his might; and in so doing he showed a charm he wore round his neck. Steinar swam at him and tore off the lucky-stone with the bag it was in. He threw them both into the water, and said:—

- " 'Long I've lived  
And I've let the gods guide me:  
Brown hose I never wore  
To bring the luck beside me.  
I never knit,  
For to keep me thriving,  
Round my neck a bag of worts,  
—And yet I'm living.'

"Afterwards Thórd went along the shore at low water (you see the spot among the brown seaweed below the tide level) and found the lucky stone and hid it."

Then followed the duel between Steinar and Bersi in which "the sword glanced off, slit Bersi's thigh, sliced it down to the knee joint and stuck in the bone: and so Bersi fell. "There" cried Steinar "Kormak's fine is paid!" But Bersi leapt up, slashed at him and clave his shield. The sword point was at his breast when Thord rushed out and dragged Steinar away out of reach. "There" cried Thórd to Bersi, "I have paid thee for the mauling of my sons!"



85. ALPTAFJÖRD FROM HELGAFELL.

From Thingvallaborg, or from Helgafell, we can see Vigrafjörður (Sword-firth) cutting off Thorsnes from the mainland, and running through the middle of the picture. At right angles with this loch is another, called Alptafjörður (Swanfirth) as being a favourite resort of the wild swans which are so plentiful in some parts of Iceland, and so fine an ornament to the dark still waters of the sheltered arms of the sea. Alptafjörður is surrounded with steep mountain sides: to the left hand is Narfeyrarfjall, to the right is Úlfarsfell; and at the back the snowy central chain of the root of Snæfellsnes.

In Narfeyrar-fjall (the fell of Narfi's ere or promontory) among enormous crags which stand upon a pedestal or plinth of lofty and steep green banks, falling without a break into the loch, is a gloomy recess, walled in by pinnacles and battlements of rock, and thresholded by a little lap of grassy Alp, high up above the sea level. This romantic site was chosen by Geirrúð, the sister of the chief of Narfeyri (the Eyr of Alptafjörður) when he offered her land to settle on. She is said to have built her house across the path, like the widow of Ásmund near Búdir, to compel wayfarers to accept hospitality; a story which seems to be a confusion with the other and better authenticated instance of a very

natural motive in a land where hospitality is still the rule, and in an age when all news-telling, shopping, and such like diversions were only possible, except in the case of the greatest houses, by attracting travellers and traders. We think it unlikely in this instance, because the remains of the house are far above the natural and necessary line of road. It looks rather like a sæter or châlet, not the chief homestead; and the name Borgardal, the same as our Borrowdale (the mediæval Borcheredale) is derived from the name of one of the rock-ridges, called Borg merely from a fancied resemblance to a castle.

Her son Thórólf found the estate too small for his ambition, he challenged Úlfr, his neighbour on the opposite bank of the fjord, for his lands or his life; and slew him, but received a wound in his leg which made him halt ever after; whence he was called Bægifót, Haltfoot.



80. BORGAR-DAL.





Vigraffjord, Helgafell, Thorsness-thing, Breidifjord and Barda-strand.

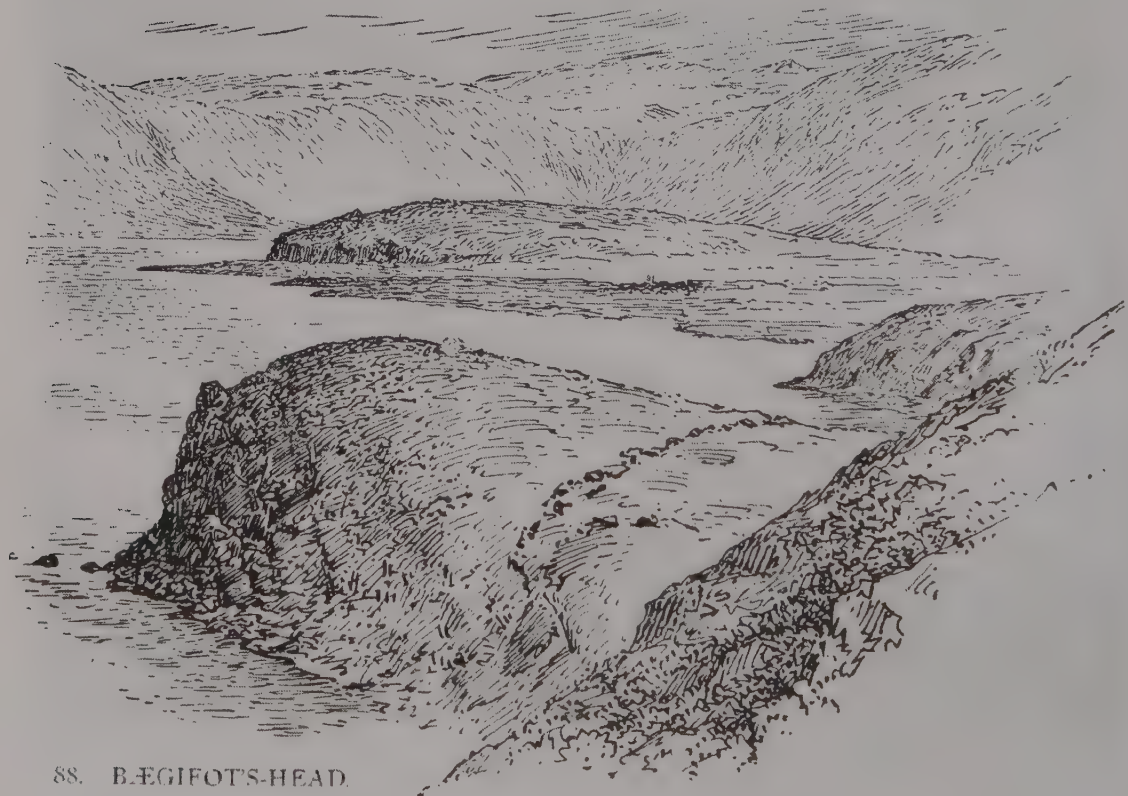
87. RUINS OF THÖRÖLF HALTFOOT'S HOUSE.  
AT HVAMM IN THORSÁRDAL (THOR'S RIVER DALE).

"Now he set up house at Hvamm in Thorsárdal. He took to himself the land after Úlfar, and was the most wrongful of men. He sold land to the freedmen of Thorbrand of Alptafjord (Snorri's foster-father)—Úlfar's-fell to Úlfar and Örlygstead to Örlyg." His son was Arnkel, the good chief of Bólstad (Bowstead) in Alptafjord, and one of his daughters was Geirrid the witch of Mewlithe. His life was one of continued ill-doing, and when he died they "buried him in howe *strongly*,"—the cairn is still seen up the valley to the right of Úlfarsfell. But he "walked" in spite of being strongly shut in under his tombstones; he maddened cattle and slew men; even the very fowls of the air that settled on his howe fell down dead. He rode the roof and scared his widow to death; and so it went on until the whole valley was deserted (as it is to this day).



So his son Arnkel dug him up and carried him on a sledge across the fell. In the journey yoke after yoke of oxen went mad and died,—and indeed it is no easy road. Then they buried him anew on a little headland that is since called Bægifót's head, and built a wall, still visible and measureable—being, as we found, 74 feet long—across “to landward of the howe, so high that none might come thereover but the fowl flying. There lay Thórólf quiet as long as Arnkel lived.”

Before long Arnkel was dead, surprised by Snorri and his men at Örlygsstadir, and buried by the shore of the fjord. In our sketch of Bægifót's head, Bólstad is marked in the middle distance by figures standing on its ruins, the cairn by other figures. The sea has now already washed away half of Arnkel's howe, which is exposed in section 56 feet in diameter, showing the charcoal and gravel of the interment; but we had not time to make further search in it, and the tide was in, so that hunting among the débris on the beach was impossible.

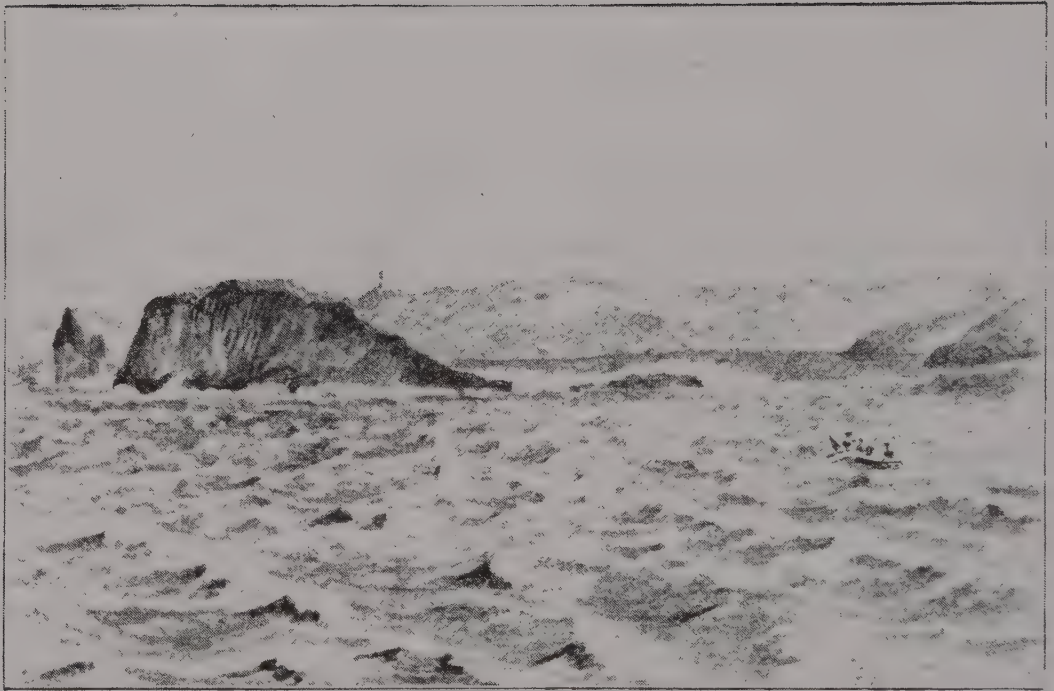


88. BÆGIFOT'S-HEAD.

Then, after Arnkel's death, Thórolf walked again, worse than ever, so that Bólstad also was deserted (as it still remains). They dug him up once more; "he was even yet unrotten, and as like to a fiend as could be, blue as hell and as big as a neat," and so heavy that they could not stir him until they got beams for levers. In the end they burned the body to ashes which they cast into the sea, thinking they had finished the business; for it must be remembered that these hauntings were not "ghosts", but the actual corpse reanimated—so it was always believed—by an evil spirit. The grave was built strong to keep the corpse down: the wall was built around to keep it in—hence perhaps the general custom of grave circles; water could not be crossed by it, if it could not be forded by living man on foot—hence the later belief about "ghosts" and witches, as in Tam o'Shanter. And the terror of the dead to an Icelfander was not the mere scare of an apparition, but the real dread of a real foe, superhuman in strength and unnaturally malign. But when this corpse of Thórolf's was destroyed the evil spirit was not done with; for a cow licked up some of the ashes and bore a bull calf into which the influence entered—so that it became the enormous devil-bull Glossy, the terror of the dale, which after killing its master leapt into a bog-hole at the head of the loch, and was never seen again.



89. ORLYGS-STADIR.



90. ELLIDA-EY.

Pilot-boat going home in half a gale.

Off Stykkishólm lies Ellida-ey, named like several other sites from the famous ship Ellidi, and mentioned more than once in sagas. When Eric the Red set forth on the voyage in which he found Greenland (A.D. 986) his friends Eyjólf and Styr of the Berserks' lava sailed with him to set him on the way "each in his own skiff as far as past Ellida-ey." From this the steamer goes in three or four hours to Flatey, site of a monastery established there in 1172 and transferred to Helgafell in 1184. It is as its name implies, low lying, like most islands in Breidifjord, with a neat and flourishing village and church, but little picturesque interest; except that the shores of the great bay, in sight around, are mountainous and precipitous, and show an endless succession of snowy crags and deep inlets, forming the coast of Barda-strand.



91. PATREKS-FJORD.



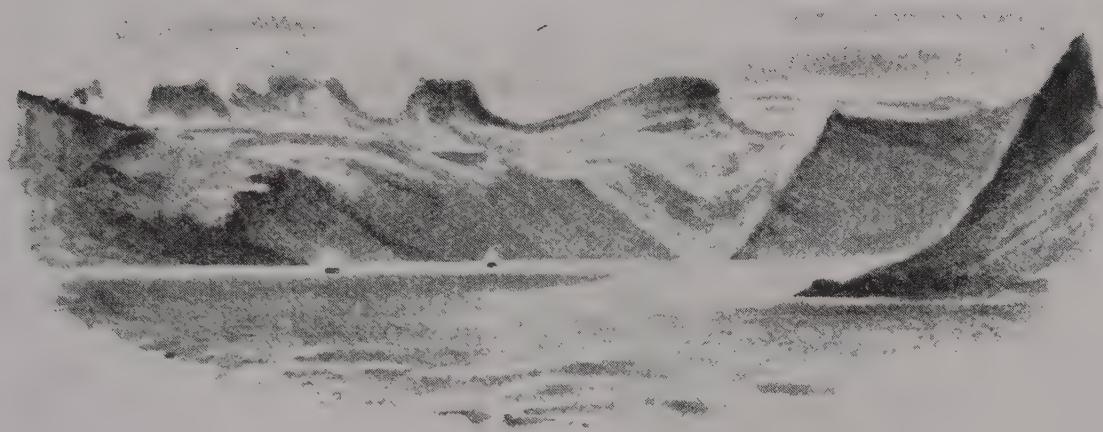
## HAUNTS OF GÍSLI SÚRSSON.

The map of Iceland has been sometimes drawn by school-boys as an eider-duck, quacking with wide opened beak; the head whereof is that great peninsula of the north west between Breidifjörð and the Arctic Ocean, and its lower mandible Snæfells-nes. In our pilgrimage we have now got into the duck's mouth: next we propose to make the tour of the head before returning to the neck for farther explorations over the ruffled quills of the back.

Rounding the westernmost point of Barda-strand, known as Látrabjarg, the Rock of the Lair (a name which seems to survive in our Lake district as Latterbarrow) we soon enter Patreksfjörð. The name has a curious origin. At the Landnáms-tide, the period of the settlement, there was a Viking of the Hebrides who had been brought up by a bishop of the Scottish Church named Patrick. Under the great St. Patrick and his followers, it will be remembered, bishops were far more plentiful than in the Roman Church; almost every other priest was a bishop. This Patrick was evidently one of the clerics of the great school of Iona; and it is interesting to find a Norse-Irish viking as his foster-child: showing, as can be shown in many other instances, that many of the invaders, who have been too hastily put down for irreclaimable savages and heathens, were often converted to Christianity, and always ready, after gaining a footing on Christian soil, to foregather with the natives.

This foster-son of bishop Patrick, Örlyg by name, resolved to settle in Iceland, whither so many of his kin were then emigrating; and the bishop, in giving him his farewell blessing, told him to look for a loch where the mountains stood high on both sides, and so forth: describing a scene that might perhaps be found in many parts of the promised land: perhaps giving particulars not recorded in the story. There had been some intercourse already between these coasts and Iceland. Irish monks had gone there as well as Norse Vikings; and the bishop had sources of information other than supernatural, we may easily believe. In any case Örlyg set sail, found the place just as it had been foretold to him, and built there, as he had been bidden, a church to St. Columba.

It is a place which lends itself to accurate description; for the lofty hillsides are more than elsewhere notched into level ridges and steps by the courses of the trap rock. The monotony of the uniform slant at some 45 degrees, while not picturesque as landscape, is impressive, as Egyptian architecture is, by mere mass and repetition. But passing out of the fjörð and round into Arnarfjörð—the loch of the eagle—the coastline, though it has little to gain by elevation, becomes bolder and bolder.



#### 92. GEIRRHJÓFS-FJORD.

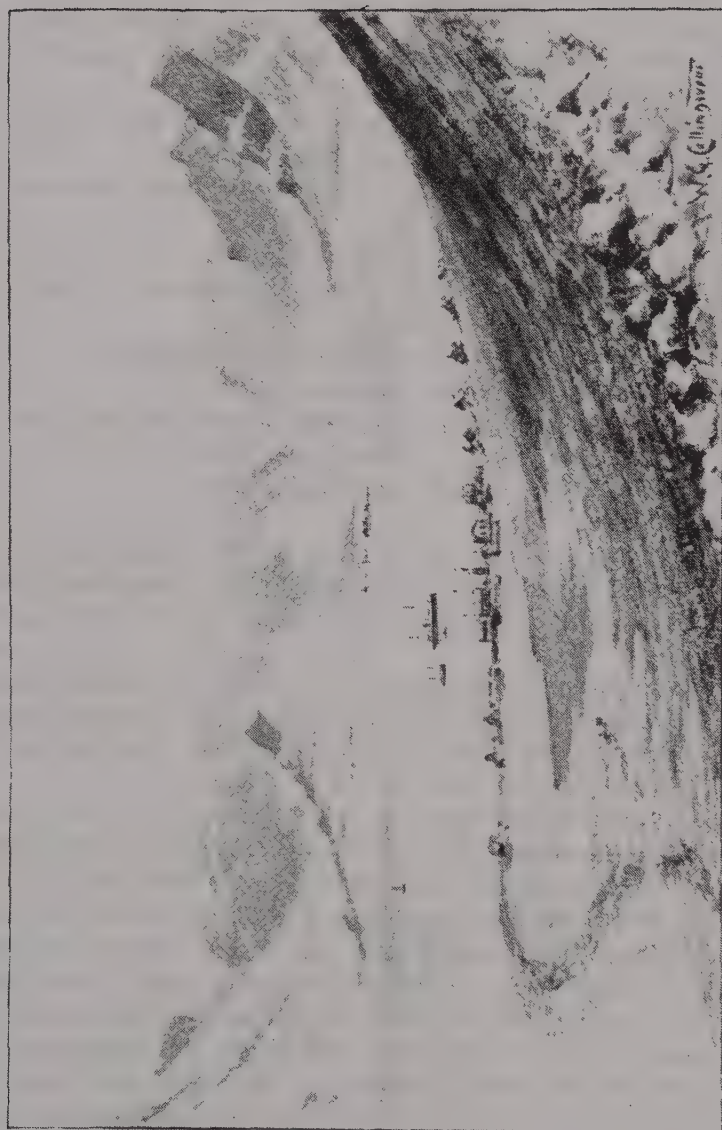
One of the lesser inlets which make up Arnarfjord is Geirrhjófs-fjord, where Gísli Súrsson lived with his faithful wife Aud and foster-daughter Gudrid during his outlawry. Here it was that the two "dream-women" haunted his sleep, and here his enemies dogged his steps and beset his house until he was killed on a crag hard by, defending himself to the last with only the woman and the girl to help him.

The next great loch is Dyrafjord—narrow and deep, with short steep valleys opening one after another on either hand, and blocked at their heads with tall snow-wreathed mountains. One of these dales, on the right hand as you sail up the fjord, is Haukadal in which near the shore are the sites of Sæböl and Hól, scenes of many events in Gísli's saga.

At Sæböl, in the house built by Gísli, his father settled on coming out from Norway. The place was given to Gísli's sister Thordis on her marriage with Thorgrím, son of Thorstein Codbiter from Thorsness, and mother of Snorri the priest of Helgafell, born after Thorgrím was slain for the murder of Gísli's friend Véstein. There had been a great feast in Sæböl for which, in spite and mockery, Véstein's own tapestry hangings had been taken from the long-suffering Gísli. Men had gone drunk to bed—when Gísli took his spear Graysteel, and donned his blue cap and kirtle, linen breeks and shoes. In the night he waded the beck, locked the byre, entered the house, put out the lamps, and stood at the opening of the shut-bed where Thorgrím and his wife slept. He reached out his hand to feel for the man he was to slay—but touched the woman.—"Why is thy



93. HAUKADAL IN DYRAFJORD.



94. THINGEVRI IN DÝRAFJÖRD.



hand so cold, Thorgrím?" said she. Then Thorgrím waked and stirred. So Gísli waited and warmed his hand in his shirt—and waked Thorgrím again:—lifted the bedclothes from him, and pinned him to the bed with Graysteel. "Waken, men in the hall," cried Thordís, "my husband is slain!" But down at Sæból all men were mad with drink and knew not what to do—and in the darkness Gísli escaped to his own house of Hól.

It was at Hól, before this, when the two brothers Gísli and Thorkel lived there with their wives, that the scene occurred of the women's gossip.

"Help me, my Aud, to cut out a shirt for my husband," said Ásgerd.

"I should not be asked if it were for my brother Véstein."

"That's another matter—and will be, many a day. I like him better than my husband; I don't care who knows."

"I have known it for long," said Aud, "Say no more."

"There's no harm in it," said Ásgerd. "And I know too that thou used to be in love with Thorgrím before thou wert married."

"But nobody was the worse for it—and since I was Gísli's wife I have never done anything to shame him. Let us stop this nonsense."

And so they did,—but Thorkel heard every word they said; and they knew it soon.

"What shall we do?" cried Aud: "we have made terrible mischief."

"Oh!" said Ásgerd, "I know a trick to mend matters."

"What then?"

"I'll coax and kiss him to-night, and tell him it was all nonsense, and not a word of truth in it—and he will be all right. Or, if he is cross,—what shall I do?"

"I know what I will do, and that at once," said Aud. "I tell my husband everything, good or ill."

And both wives carried out their plans. Thorkel was, as his wife expected, angry. Gísli was, as his wife knew, kind: but the gossip grew into a scandal—and the tragedy of Véstein's murder followed at Hól soon after—to be revenged by the slaying of Thorgrím, and completed by the outlawry and death of Gísli.

A mile or two farther up the fjord is the promontory of Thingeyri, where the Westfirth men held their meetings. Here Gísli and his brother Thorkel and friend Véstein were on the point of making the oath of brotherhood with Thorgrím.

"They went out of their booth to the point of the ere, and cut up a sod of turf leaving both its ends in the earth, and propped it up with a spear scored with runes so high that a man might lay his hand on the socket of the spear head. Under this yoke they passed, and then each opened a vein and let blood fall on the mould whence the turf had been cut, and touched it. Then they fell on their knees, and were about to take hands and swear to avenge each the other as though he were his brother, and to call all the gods to witness. But Thorgrím drew back saying "I have enough to do if I swear to Thorkel and Gísli, my brothers-in-law; why should I undertake this for Véstein?"

"Very well," said Gísli, "nor shall I swear to anyone who will not swear to my friend." And so the oath was never taken, and the four, from friends, became foes.



#### 95. THE HORN.

The North Cape of North-western Iceland.

The extreme point of the Northwest of Iceland—missing the Arctic Circle by so little that the passing ship sails into view of the midnight sun, is a tall pointed rock or “Horn,” worthy of its name. It was at sunrise after the short night of August that we saw it, crimsoned in the glow of the morning. To northward the glare was broadening over long wreaths of broken fog that marked the place of the ice-pack—at that time not distant from the coast. The Arctic sea was calm; a few schooners dotted the horizon of a picture as rich in colour and as lovely in repose as any Mediterranean sea-scape. Only the keen air told that we were in waters that washed Spitzbergen and the polar ice. To eastward steep lines of mountainous coast broke into the quiet sea, with curves of shoreward glacier, and white pillars where great waterfalls tumbled over the sea-wall into the slow recurring breakers of the swell after a heavy gale.

96. THE HORN AT SUNRISE.









Along this inhospitable coast live the least known and most forlorn of Icelanders. They are cut off from communication with the rest of the world for a great part of the year. They have to wait for weeks or months in winter before they can get to church to be baptized or married, or to bury their dead. Once, the story goes, they left a coffin in the snow, being overtaken by a storm on their way to church. All the winter they had to leave it there. When spring came, the melting of the snowdrifts at last uncovered the body, and the funeral so strangely interrupted could be accomplished. Many a tourist has passed the Hornstrandir on his steamboat voyage; but very few strangers have ever set foot on the coast or made the acquaintance of its people, the most primitive of all the inhabitants of Iceland.



97. HORNSTRANDIR FROM HUNAFLÓI.



98. SPAKONUFELL.

Our last sketch was taken from the place where the steamboat stops, after crossing the great bay of Hunaflói. From the same point, looking eastward, we get another historical scene. Here at Spákonufell, Spæ-quean's fell, on the Skaga-strand, lived Thordis the witch,—her house was on the site of the house shown on the extreme right hand. Her witchcraft plays a great part in the story of Kormak, and it was her advice, at the critical moment when he was tempted to console himself with a good match in place of his lost love, which turned the scale, and made him into the "Petrarch of the North," as he has been called,—the faithful lover and lifelong poet of a wedded woman who never could be his.



## IX. THE DALES:

### WHERE GUDRÚN LIVED AND KJARTAN DIED.

After our excursion to the fjords of the north-west let us return to Thors-nes and take up the land journey where we left it—going from Alptafjord through the Dalir (Dales) famous in the great Laxdæla and many another saga.

These dales are to Snæfellsnes what the Border dales are to Scafell and Skiddaw: and like the valleys of Esk and Eden which radiate from Solway, these radiate from Hvamms-fjord. Only everything is on a somewhat larger scale. If we may put it so, Hvamms-fjord resembles a top boot, laid down, with its heel to the East and its toe to the North. The top of the boot is marked off by the islands of Brokey and Öxney and the twin peaks of Dimunar-klakkar, which with their satellites almost close the mouth of the fjord: but east of the line there is an almost unbroken sheet of water of nearly twenty miles from the top to the heel—and over twelve miles from the back of the heel to the tip of the toe—forming a great landlocked salt lake.



Dimunar-klakkar.

Dögurðar-nes.

#### 99. HVAMMS-FJORD AND ITS ISLANDS.

From Skógar-strönd (Shaw-strand).

From the point of the heel at Snóksdal three great valleys radiate, Hörda-dal, Middal, and Haukadal. North of the last and opening into the instep of the boot is the great Laxár-dal. Into the toe of the boot run the rivers Ljá (Lea), Fáskrúds-á and Glerá,—and the streams of Svinadal (Swindale), Sælingsdal (from sæling, rich man) and Hvamm. All these dales—good grass land and once rich with woods—resemble the dales of the Scottish border not only in scenery, but in the fact that they are haunted with the tradition of a tragic love-story.

Hörda-dal, the dale of Queen Aud's man, Hörd,—is a fine valley with snowy mountains at its head—and on one of its slopes a rock where eagles build, isolated like the Pillár of Ennerdale. Once, the local legend runs, the eagle from this eyrie carried off a child from the farm below. The mother ran wildly over the moor and up the screes only to fall dead at the foot of the pinnacle she could not climb—thenceforth called Trega-stein, the Stone of Sorrow. At the valley's head is Tunga, where lived Thorgils, son of Halla, a busy, pretentious man who plays some part in the story of Gudrún.



100. TUNGA IN HÖRDA-DAL.



Dímunar-Klakkar. Leidhólm. Dögurðar-nes.  
101. HVAMMSFJORD FROM SAUDAFELL.

Near the mouth of Midá (mid-water) where the river wanders among marshy flats, is Leidhólm, a firm piece of ground known of old as a place of combat. It was here that Kormak, the young singer, fought his first duel with the hardened champion Bersi who had carried off his ladylove.

From Leidhólm in the distance Saudafell is seen, a rounded hill on whose side is the settlement first given by Queen Aud to her freedman Erp, said to be the son of Earl Meldun of Scotland. Thórólf "Rednose" (who comes into Laxdæla saga) afterwards lived there: still later it was the seat of Sturla Sighvatsson, nephew of the historian Snorri Sturluson. It had no importance in the heroic age, but in mediæval times was the scene of incidents in civil war. The present owner, when we were there, had recently been digging foundations for a house, and had come upon a large cellar and drains of good solid masonry, showing how much more complete and elaborate were the early dwellings than the rude farm houses of the degenerate nineteenth century.





102. BAULA FROM SAUDAFELL.

The view from Saudafell looking southward embraces the upper reaches of the Midá valley, which breaks into two branches. Sökkólfssdal is to the left, the home of another of Queen Aud's men, and afterwards haunted by Grettir the Strong in his outlaw days. Here Thórodd, son of Snorri the priest, came to fight him. Grettir drew no weapon, but only warded off his strokes with a shield; and when he was tired out, caught him and set him down to be scolded like a naughty child, and then sent him home to his father.

Hundadal on the right hand was the scene of a warlock's death, over whose head they threw a bag, as in the killing of Katla the witch, so that he might not avert his end by the evil eye. But there was a hole in the bag, and where his glance shot out, the hillside was blasted,—as it is, says the popular tradition, to this day; a tradition not borne out by facts; for the people of the place assured us there was no better pasture than the slopes of Hundadal.

The peak in the distance is Baula, which we have already seen from the south. It is a three sided cone of great steepness made more difficult on account of the looseness of the scree-slopes which are the only lines of access, and afford no safe foothold. It has, however, been often climbed.





103. VATNSHORN IN HAUKADAL.

From Saudafell across Hvammsfjörður are seen the twin peaks of Dimunarklakkar, a name, like Store Dimon in the Faroes and Stóri Dimon near Eyjafell, brought from Ireland, and usually thought to be Irish Latin,—*quasi* Di-mons, double mountain. Under their shelter Eric the Red hid his ship before sailing about 985 A.D. on the voyage in which he discovered Greenland. He had lived in this valley of Haukadal, where the ruins of his house are still shown, a little farther up the valley than Vatnshorn. The site has been lately dug and described by Thorstein Erlingsson; but compared with other ancient halls it is not very extensive, nor are the surroundings picturesque. Eric was a settler from Norway, a somewhat unquiet neighbour, whose feuds and manslayings caused him to be twice outlawed, the second time at the Thorsness-thing in spite of the support of his friend Styr, a kindred spirit. He had heard of one Gunnbjörn who had been driven westward over-seas and had found land; and so he resolved to seek the unknown shore, and never to return unless he found it. In three years he came back with the news that he had found and settled a new country, and, says the Book of Flatey, "he called it Greenland, for it would make men's minds eager to go there if it had a fine name." It seems he not only discovered America—Greenland being part of it—first of any white man, but along with it the art of advertising.



Harrastadir.

The mountains of Hördadal.

Hvammfsjörd.

104. RUINS OF HRÚT'S HALL AND TUN-GARTH AT HRÚTSSTADIR.

Readers of the story of *Burnt Njál* remember Hrút, who saw "thief's eyes" in the head of his niece, Höskuld's pretty daughter, Hallgerd. Though so much of the action of *Njála* passes in the south, this part belongs to the dales. Here was Hrút's house, where now is a mound of green ruin, and a tumbled field broken into heaps by the frost of many winters, surrounded by an ancient garth. It stands above the flat shore of Hvammfsjörd, in view of the openings of Haukadal and Middal and Hördadal, finely placed for outlook, and for the needs of a pastoral farmer. The land was given him by his brother Höskuld, says *Laxdæla saga*: "Hrút moved house and lived at the place now called Hrútsstadir till his old age."





105. TRÖLLASKEID: RUINS OF HRÚTS TEMPLE.

"He had a temple in his meadow, and there are traces of it: it is now called Tröllaskeid (Giants' ground). The public way runs past it now." What was true in the early part of the 13th century, when the saga was written, is true at the end of the nineteenth. The traces of the temple are visible, lately dug into and identified: and beyond is the flat promontory of Kambsnes, so called from the incident that Queen Aud, in her voyage from Bjarnarhöfn hither, in search of a home, landed to "prospect," and lost her comb, which none of her party could find.



106. LAXARDAL.

North of Hrótsstadir the Laxá runs into Hvammsfjord (Salmon River: Laxey in the Isle of Man and Laxweir in Ireland are similar names). The valley of the Laxá is well-known to English readers from William Morris's poem of "The Lovers of Gudrun," which epitomises Laxdæla saga, and tells the tale of the family that lived at the two great houses of Höskuldsteadi and Herdholt. The dale is open and broad; once well wooded, but now bare and somewhat featureless, though the river is fine, and snowpeaks look over the low ridges of hill on either hand. The nearer farm in our view is Saurbæ (Sowerby, the muddy farm) where are remains of iron-smelting works of the early age. Beyond it, on a hill, is the house of Höskuld.





107. THE TÚN-BREKKA OF HÖSKULDS-STADIR.

In Laxdæla we read of Höskuld's parentage from Koll, a viking from Ireland or the Hebrides (Coll, in Gaelic, is "hazel," and Colla an Irish name), afterwards known as Koll of the dales, and from one of the granddaughters of Queen Aud. We are told how he bought a beautiful dumb girl in Denmark from a slave dealer and took her home to his stead in Laxárdal. "One morning Höskuld was going out to look over his farm; the weather was good; the sun shone and was not risen high in the sky. He heard talking; he went toward the place *where a brook ran round the brow of the meadow* (tún-brekka)." There he saw two whom he knew, the bondwoman and her baby Olaf. He discovered that she was not dumb, for she was talking to her child. Then Höskuld went to them and asked her

name, saying it was no use hiding it any longer. She said it should be so, and they sat down on the brow of the meadow. Then she told him that her name was Melkorka (*Mel*, in Gaelic, is "honey," and *corcar* is "rosy") daughter of an Irish king Myrkiartan (Muirceartach, in modern Ireland Murtagh and Moriarty). She had been stolen away when she was fifteen, and had feigned dumbness, hoping perhaps for some chance of escape. Just about the time when this raid must have happened, the Irish annals of the Four Masters record that Muirceartach MacNeill was captured by Vikings (about 937 A.D.). He, however, escaped, and had many a revenge on the Dublin Danes. Her son Olaf grew up to be the famous Olaf the Peacock; he was sent to Ireland and received and recognized by the old King Muirceartach, the saga says: though the famous king of that name was then (about 955) dead, and Domhnall, his son, reigned over Ulster, in that year becoming *ard-ri* or overlord of all Ireland. Returning to his native dale, Olaf married the daughter of Egil Skallagrimsson of Borg, and set up house at Goddastadir, higher up the valley. Here he prospered greatly, and at last moved to Herdholt, over against Höskuldstead, now represented by the group of houses and church seen in the distance of this view. The flitting was a great event; Höskuld from his own house-door watched the procession of sheep and cattle and horses, in one unbroken line from the old farm to the new, a distance of three miles (¾ Danish mile).

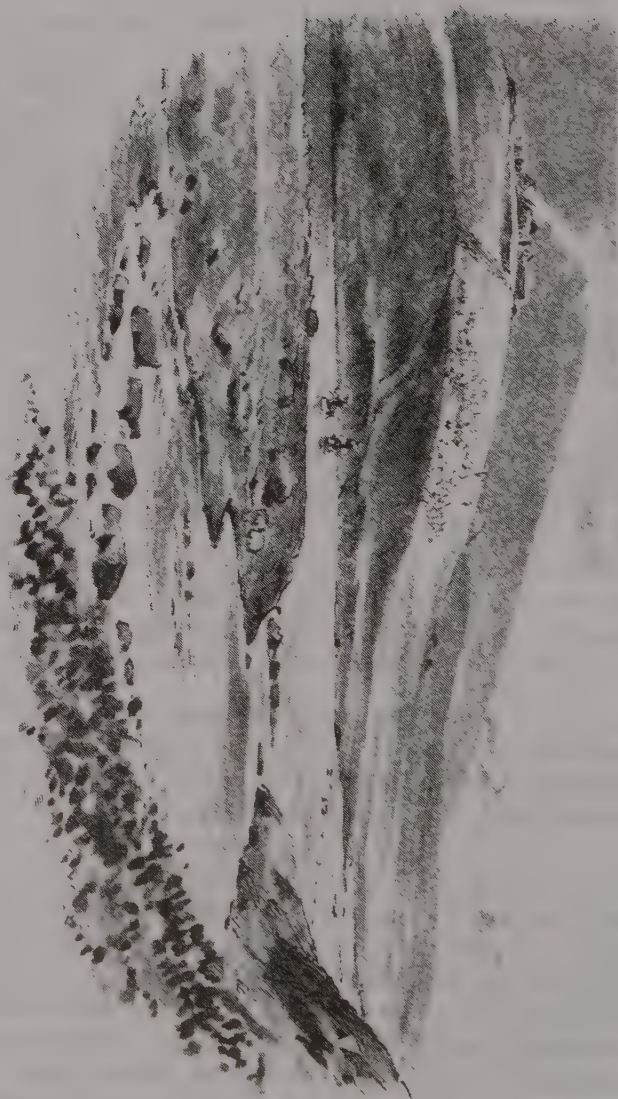
At Höskuld's death Olaf shared the inheritance and undertook the whole expense of the funeral. To the Arval or funeral feast "twelve hundreds of people," that is twelve times one hundred and twenty, the ancient hundred, were invited; a great hall was put up for the occasion on the flat hill-top, where traces of it remain just to right of the house in our sketch.

Of the story of Olaf and his still more famous son Kjartan, so named after the Irish king his grandfather, we need say little, for Morris's poem has made it familiar. Our work is rather to illustrate the tale by pictures of the places where events happened that have been thought worthy of rehearsal by "sacred bards" ancient and modern.

Höskuldstead is on its little hill, approached from the four airts by its four lanes (*tröd*: we still use *tröd* in the same sense in the North of England). To northward one path leads down to the waterside and ford. The land all around is good pasturage, gently sloping to the river, which runs under broken and rocky banks—

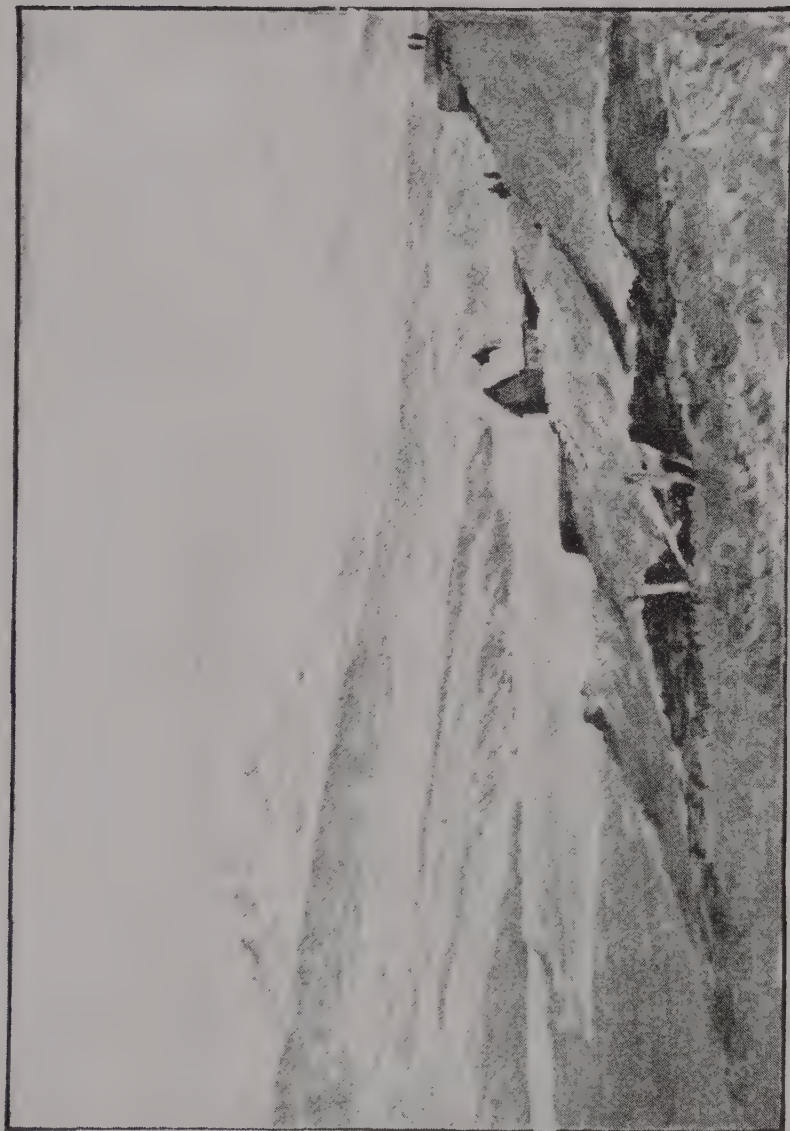
"A river bare  
That glides the dark hills under."

Like Yarrow, Laxá is not an Alpine torrent, such as Fródá is, nor a ravaging flood such as Markarfljót; but a perfect pastoral stream. It comes down from the uplands—wide stretches of sedgy peat-bog and glaciated rock—gathering power from innumerable rivulets as it falls with the gentle slope of a long valley, winding a little here and broadening there, but steadily descending without any cataract or lake, until between the two homesteads it ripples over the pebble-beds and eddies under green banks all beset with the wild thyme and the crimson bloodberry of Iceland. The lambs run out in a noisy flock from Höskuldstead, and bleat along its borders, and the Herdholt lambs bleat back to them. Bye and bye a traveller rides down the *tröd*—you see the flash and splash as his horse plunges into the current and struggles up the shingle bed; clatters over it and down to the backwater. Just



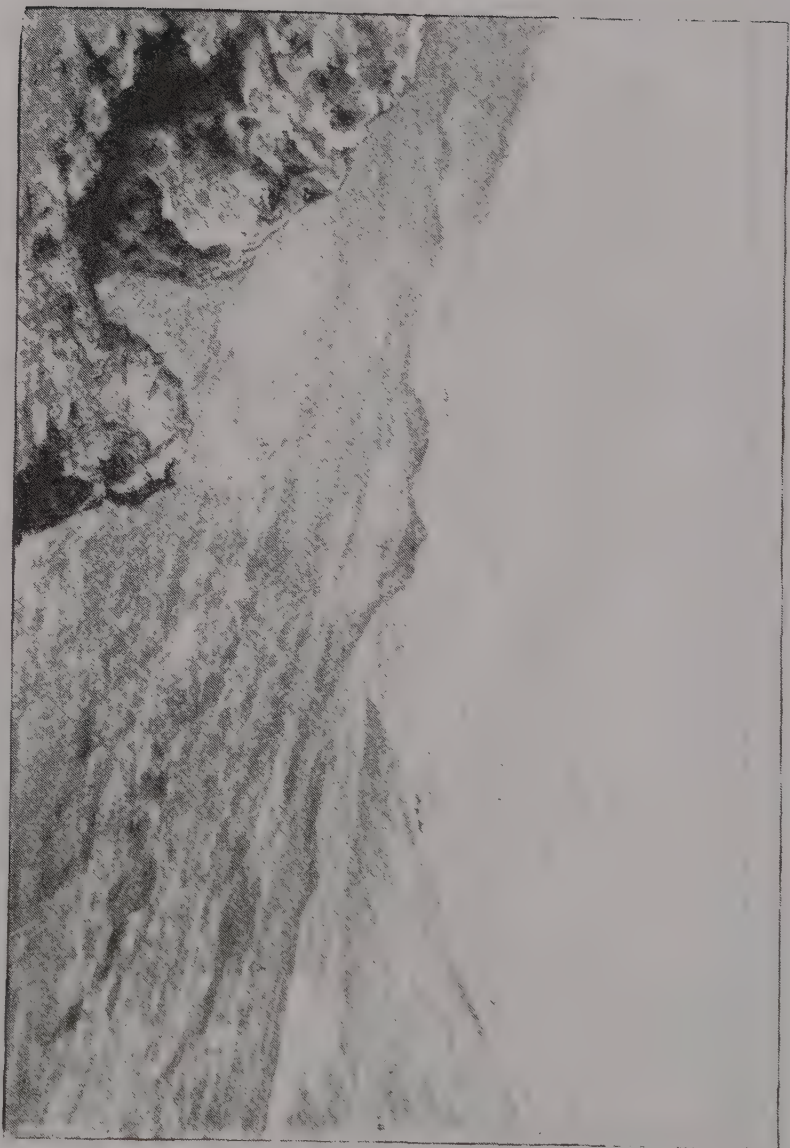
108. THE FORD OF LANA, AND HÖSKULDS-STADIR





109. HJARDARHOLT, LOOKING DOWN THE VALLEY.





Brúastada Innik      Svartfells Innikar.  
Svartföll Kjafshólar.      Þrárnargill.  
110. LAXÁRDAL. LOOKING UP THE VALLEY FROM HJARDARHOLT.  
Leitfellsstaðir.

so it was in Kjartan's days : the scene is unchanged, except for the want of fringing coppice that then softened the shadows of the gills and the outlines of the brown moor—long dark masses heaved against the sky : except, too, that proud halls stood on the heights where now are modest farmhouses. But the same spots are still inhabited, and no more—the same paths traverse the dale, and no more—the same fields are mown, and no more. And looking down into the valley from afar off, with no smoke-cloud to dim them, there are the peaks of distant mountains that Kjartan saw—deep blue and flashing with snow.

Olaf Peacock's house was built partly with driftwood, but mostly with wood cut in the dale; showing that though there never could have been large timber, there was once abundant coppice with trunks big enough to use in building an especially large hall, as this is said to have been. A second hall was afterwards made, "bigger and better than the first. There were drawn goodly sagas on the wainscot panels and also on the roof. That was so well smithied that it was thought much finer when the hangings were not up." From this hint in the original, Morris, our decorator-poet, has constructed his description of the hero Kjartan's birthplace,—feigned, but not false.

"They passed the garth-wall, and drew rein before  
The new-built hall's well carven, fair porch-door,  
And Guest laughed out with pleasure, to behold  
Its goodly fashion, as the Peacock told  
With what huge heed and care the place was wrought,  
And of the Norway earl's great wood, he brought  
Over the sea; then in they went and Guest  
Gazed through the cool dusk, till his eyes did rest  
Upon the noble stories, painted fair  
On the high panelling and roof-boards there . . .  
" Then to the presses in the cloth-room there  
Did Olaf take him, and showed hangings fair  
Brought from the southlands far across the sea,  
And English linen and fair napery,  
And Flemish cloth; then back into the hall  
He led him, and took arms from off the wall,  
And let the mail-coat rings run o'er his hands,  
And strung strange bows brought from the fiery lands.  
Then through the butteries he made him pass,  
And, smiling, showed what winter stock yet was;  
Fish, meal, and casks of wine, and goodly store  
Of honey, that the bees had grumbled o'er  
In clover fields of Kent. Out went they then  
And saw in what wise Olaf's serving-men  
Dealt with the beasts, and what fair stock he had,  
And how the maids were working blithe and glad  
Within the women's chamber. Then at last  
Guest smiled and said: 'Right fair is all thou hast!'"



### III. LJÄRSKÖGAR; THE TEMPLE.

From Herdholt, which is nearly on the ridge of the watershed, it is easy travelling the road that Kjartan took when he went a-wooing,—down to Ljärskógar, and along the shore of Hvammsfjord to Bathstead.

Thorstein Kuggason—descendant of Queen Aud's son Thorstein the Red—lived here. He was a kinsman of Grettir the Strong, and harboured him in his outlawry for a while. "Thorstein was a busy man and a good smith, and kept men close to their work; but Grettir had little mind to work, wherefore their tempers went but little together. Thorstein had let make a church at his homestead; and a bridge he had made out from his house wrought with great craft, for in the outside bridge, under the beams that held it up, were rings wrought all about, and din-bells, so that one might hear over to Scarfstead, half a sea-mile off, if aught went over the bridge, because of the shaking of the rings."



112. LJARSKOGAR: THORSTEIN KUGGASON'S ANVIL AND SLAG-HEAP.

This is said to have been in 1018, by which time Christianity was established, and the temple, of which the ruins are plainly seen, 46 by 48 feet, was deserted. Thorstein's smithy is on the other side of the house, with the great stone he is said to have used for anvil, and the heap of slag from his bloomery or smelting furnace, which is exactly like the ancient bloomeries in Furness, with slag to all appearance identical.





113. REMAINS OF CHURCH AND CHURCH-BRIDGE, LJARSKOGAR.

The remains of Thorstein's church are there also, and a long mound—ruins of the Kirkju-brú ("church bridge" 282 feet long), reaching from it to the house, which no doubt stands on the site of the ancient hall. The ground between church and house is, as it always must have been, good meadow or *tún*. Thorstein could have walked to church like any other Christian, one thinks in surveying the site: why should he have built a bridge? Was it, perhaps,—seeing so many ancient bridges were covered,—merely a covered way or gallery? And if so lightly built that the vibration of a footstep set its bells a-ringing, how comes there to be so marked a mound of ruins?

Queen Aud\* of Dublin came out to her brother Björn in Bjarnar-höfn, and stayed with him only a winter. Then, being as her surname showed, "the deeply wealthy,"† and consequently followed by too large a meinie to live upon mere hospitality, she went forth to find a home of her own. She sailed round Thorsnes and came to a cape in Middlefellstrand—the promontory that stands out into Breidifjord, and there she landed and took breakfast—and the place is called Breakfast-ness (Dögurdarnes) to this day. Then she entered Hvammsfjord—and lost her comb while staying awhile on that shore which is therefore still called Kambs-nes. Finally her high-seat pillars were found cast up at the head of the fjord, and she abode there at first by the sea—afterwards building a house a little way up the valley.

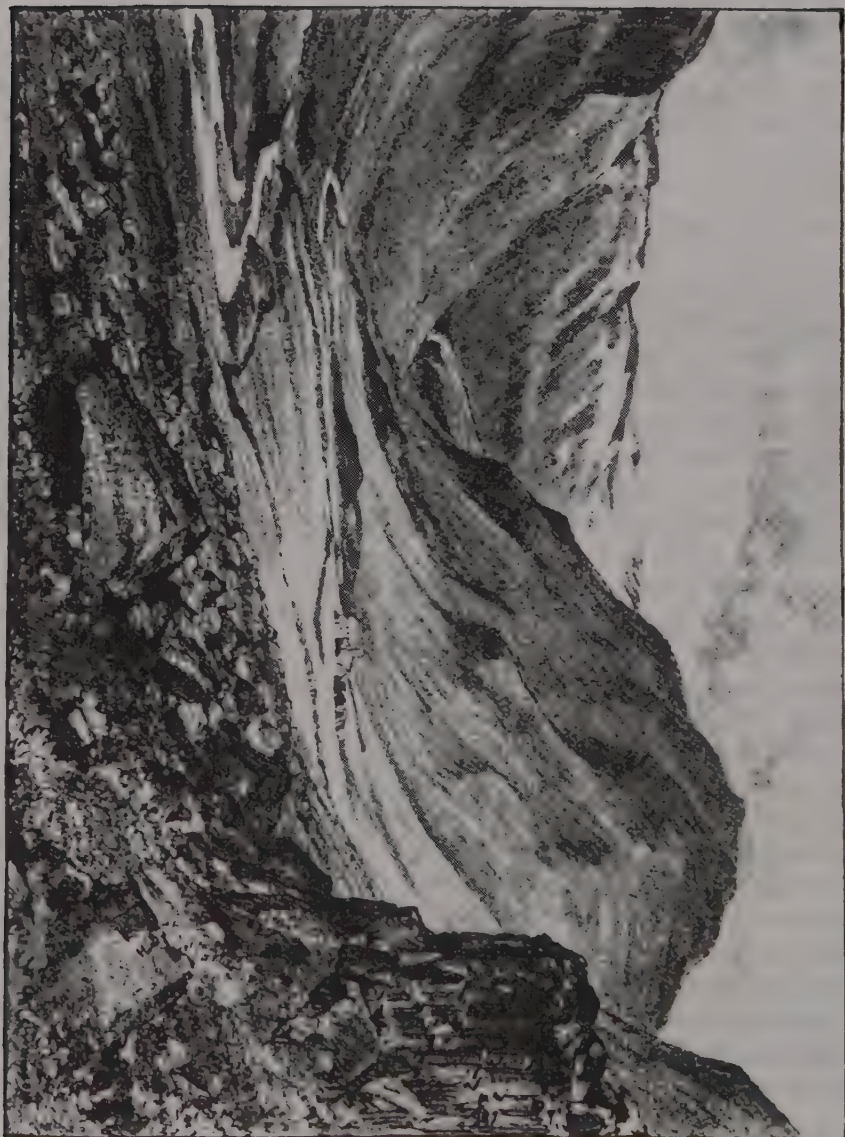
Hvamm is a valley like our Borrowdale in picturesque character, except that the crags, when you come to look at them in detail, are much grander and more massive; with a goodly river coming down from the mountains in cascades as fine as the Handeck of the Alps, and after some miles of broken fall through ravines, spreading out between sloping fields and winding seaward; but—as Derwent-water continues Borrowdale, the fjord carries on the valley, here completely land-locked and shut in by the snow capped peaks of Hördadal. The aspect of the valley is toward the east of south—its climate mild and situation sheltered. Nowhere is the vegetation richer in varied ferns and flowers; every gill and cranny is as full of interest as the nooks of our Lakeland. In ancient times the place was richly wooded—and now again the efforts of the present holder, who has planted largely, seem likely to be rewarded before long by the reafforesting of the mountain sides.

It was in this pleasant place—strangely different from the general idea of Icelandic bleakness—that the Queen of Dublin settled, and spent her latest years. She married off her grand-daughters, and at last, when her youngest grandchild, Olaf Feilan, came of age, made him a great wedding feast, and invited her brethren Björn and Helgi with all the countryside. This was early in the tenth century; Aud had been widowed thirty years before: and Laxdæla says "Old age was coming fast upon her, so that she rose at mid-day and laid her down early. No man might come asking her questions between the time when she went to sleep in the evening and when she was dressed: and if anyone asked how she did she answered sharply. This day she slept longer than usual, but got afoot before the guests came, and went to meet them and made them welcome, saying that they had shown her great love in making that long journey. Then she led them into the hall, and when they were all set down to a great feast, said 'Brother Björn, and Helgi, and all kinsmen and friends, this house and all you see in it I now give over to Olaf, my grandson, to hold and to enjoy.' After that stood she up and said she must go to her chamber where she slept, but bade every man enjoy himself and the ale. She had been tall and strong, and now, as she walked with a firm and quick step forth of the hall, everyone said what a fine old lady she was. Next

\*Audr means "treasure"—pronounced by the Modern Icelanders something like Urth, with the flat th, or dh. Her other name Unn—usually translated "sea" should rather be connected with *unna*, to love: a pretty name for old Kettle Flatnose to give her.

† or "Deep-minded"

114. HVAMM IN HVAMNSSVEIT.







115 LAUGAR (BATHSTEAD).



morning Olaf Feilan went to her room and found her sitting up on her pillows, dead. Men thought a deal of it, how wonderfully she had kept up her dignity to her dying day: and now drank Olaf's bridale and her arvale together."

Later, Hvamm was the home of Sturla, the father of Snorri Sturluson, who was born there, and so it retained its interest as one of the chief historical sites of Iceland. Some traces of Queen Aud's Celtic retinue seem to linger in the local dialect, of which Séra Kjartan gave us two curious words, *slafak*, "long grass," and *cradak*, "a crowd of children." Both are in the dictionary, but unexplained, except by the suggestion that the latter is "perhaps akin to A.S. *cræd*, Eng. *crowd*." Mr. John Rogers, of Barrow-in-Furness, a Gaelic scholar, tells us that in Irish "*slamhac* (pronounced *slavak*) means 'long rank grass,' or green corn too long to stand upright; also a name for the longest kind of seaweed. It is rather obscure," he says, "for I have never come across it in books, and have only heard it in remote corners. *Kradak* seems more difficult. I can only suggest *creacht* (pronounced like 'laughed,' but *ch* guttural and *t=dh*), meaning 'a herd of cattle,' &c. It would surely have a diminutive when applied to children, and would then become *creaghdag*, *craghdog*, from which the transference is easy."

Queen Aud was a Christian, and set up crosses on the hill near. After her death her people relapsed into heathenism, but they still revered the Kross-hólar (Cross hills), and thought her family "died into them," as the Thorsnessings into Helgafell. Curiously enough, the rocks shown nowadays as Kross-hólar do not tally with the description of them in the Sturla-saga (c. 21). Gudbrand Vigfússon, in his English edition of Sturlunga (II. p. 510), thinks the real Kross-hólar must have been Laugar-hólar near the hot spring; which Aud, "fresh from a land in which springs had long been objects of the highest reverence," would naturally wish to hallow by setting up the cross. Sigurd Vigfússon, however, thought that the traditional Cross hills were correctly named.

Our Plate III gives a distant view to which we may refer in illustration of the topography of these interesting places. Looking from Ljárskógar across the fjord we see the valley of Hvamm, rather to the left hand, under snowy hills which are seen again in Plate III. Then, above the figures in Plate III, a break in the hill-slope close to the water-line shows the traditional Kross-hólar. To the extreme right, Sælings-dal opens; and at its entrance, turning sharply to the left, we come to the Laugar-hólar.

Beneath these Laugar-hólar, where the boiling water spurts in a strange cascade from the rock encrusted with white petrifications and wreathed with moss-cushions, ferns and flowers, a natural hothouse; under noble crags overlooking the valley of Sælingsdal and the fjord, lies the home of Gudrún, whose grave we have seen at Helgafell. Her father, Ósvífr, was great-grandson, on the father's side, to Björn, the brother of Aud; and grandson, on the mother's side, to Kathleen, daughter of no less a personage than Rolf the Ganger, first duke of Normandy—so Laxdæla says. In this lovely spot Gudrún grew up the most lovely of girls, to win the love of Kjartan, the noblest of lads—in the Laugar which Laxdæla has made classic for saga-readers, the Bathstead, as Morris translated it in his English poem. We saw the place on a showery day, when cloud-rack brushed the sky-line of the crags, and passing gleams of sunshine made the buttercups of the meadow brighter than gold.

Right opposite Bathstead, a sharp isolated peak of rock rises from the middle of the glen, and behind it, under the Lyth, are the two farms of Sælingsdals-tunga. Here Guðrún lived her married life with Bolli. After his death, when the memories of the place had made it too painful for her, she proposed to Snorri the Priest an exchange of lands, and moved to Helgafell. Snorri lived here and was buried in a churchyard long deserted, and now a mere heap of broken earth.

From hence the panorama is wide over the shores of Hvammsfjord. To the left above Ljárskógur and the low ridge that confines Laxárdal, rises Baula in the far distance still conspicuous. On the right are the mountains of Hördadal, and beneath them, dark against the loch, are the so-called Kross-hólar, forming a buttress to the mass which divides the valley of Hvamm from the dell of Bathstead.



Laxárdal.

Baula.

Hvammsfjord.

Hördadal Krosshólar.



117. SÆLINGS-DAL.

Up this valley, which is a highland glen in every detail, Bolli had a mountain farm, a sæter, to which he went in summer. There were two small huts, one for sleeping and one for a "bower" or storehouse. The glen was then thickly wooded, and when his death was resolved upon in revenge for Kjartan's, his enemies had no difficulty in coming upon him unawares: riding, nine men, with Thorgerd the mistress of Herdholt, through the cover of the foliage until the sound of their approach surprised Bolli and Gudrún. They were alone at the cottage: the servants had gone to their shepherding tasks on the hillside. He bade Gudrún out of the place, for it would be no game of play, he knew: and she, who had no great love for him, though this deed was not of her planning, went to wash linen in the brook. The fight was furious, one against nine, and she all but looked on. When it was



over she went to talk with the slayers, and he who had given the death-wound wiped his bloody spear upon the fringe of her scarf. She snatched it out of his hand, it is said, but they could not tell for certain whether she was glad or sorry at what they had done.

Bolli had married her by guile. Kjartan had seemed to slight her. She sacrificed Kjartan to her pride, Bolli to her love: and yet Bolli was her husband: his death too required vengeance, which came in later days.

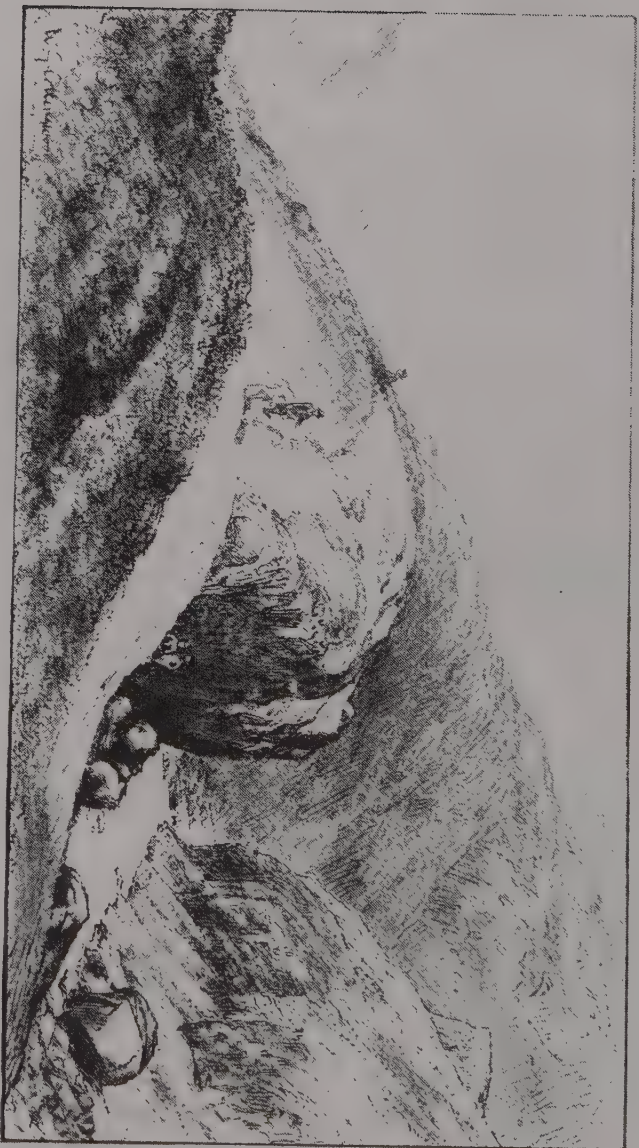
Yet one more page from *Laxdæla*, read in presence of the scene it illustrates,—an o'er true tale, we may believe it, with all allowance made for the shortcomings of tradition.

Up from the last named site runs a long glen, at its opening narrow and not very deep, but increasing in romantic interest with every step. The hillsides are covered with ling and a small torrent foams along the ravine above which a path winds,—in old time, as now, the main road leading north from the Dales. At half an hour's ride up Svínadal (Swindale) a cloven gully runs up sharply to the right hand called Hafragil, the spot where Guðrún's brothers laid their ambush for Kjartan as he came from the north with only two followers. Under these rocks they sat, where the figures sit in the sketch, and on the brink above, looking up the valley to Mjósund, sat Bolli, Kjartan's faithless friend who had stolen his love. He had refused to take part in the plot. It was only Guðrún's taunts that forced him to it; but—"Hell knows no fury like a woman scorned." The brothers, says the saga, guessing he meant to betray them, went up to the brink and fell to horse-play and fooling, and took his feet and dragged him down the brink. Soon Kjartan came, riding hard; it was only when he came to the edge of the gill (—just there where the white horse stands—) that he saw men lying in wait and knew who they were.

"He leaped from his horse to attack them. A great stone stood there." He set his back to it and fought until his two men had fallen, and several of the enemy. All the while Bolli stood apart, until at last, Kjartan said, "Bolli my brother, why came ye from home to stand idle here?" But Bolli seemed deaf. Then Ospak, Guðrún's brother cried out upon him too; it would be an undying shame after pledging his help—so he said—to fail them. With that Bolli heaved up his sword and rushed at his friend.

"A coward's deed, brother!" cried Kjartan, throwing down his own weapon,—“but,” as he got his death-blow, “much better indeed to take my death from thee than to give thee thine.”





118. WHERE KJARTAN DIED.

Mjósumd on the left: the Brekka where Bolli sat: the stone where Kjartan fought: the hiding place of Gudrún's brothers: and Hafnagil on the right.



119. DRIFANDA-GIL IN SVINADAL.

## X. KORMAK'S COUNTRY:

### SAURBÆ, HRÚTAFJORD AND MIDFJORD.

For the land that lies round about Hrútafjord,—Saurbæ, Gilsfjord, Bitra, on the one side, and Midfjord on the other,—we take leave to use the name of Kormak's country, because in it passes the action of the saga with the Irish name, the story of Kormak the Skald, his romantic love and unfortunate life.

Continuing the journey up Svinadal over the pass of Mjósund, we find higher mountains and wilder gorges. At the summit of the pass an erroneous tradition gives the name of Kjartan's stone to an enormous boulder, perched on an ancient moraine mound; as though the biggest rock in the neighbourhood must have been that by which the greatest hero fell.

Down the pass we find a succession of curious waterfalls of which Drífanda-gil, with its snowbridge—an unmelted drift-wreath,—is a specimen.

The descent is stopped by a mountain shoulder coming across the valley, and deflecting the course of the stream at right angles to the left. This shoulder is Bessa-tunga, Bersi's Tongue,—compare "Tongue" in Troutbeck. Here lived the old fighting man whom we have seen at the swimming match of Thorsnes and the holmgang of Leidhólm. He is mentioned also in Laxdæla as the fosterer of Olaf Peacock's son Halldór, and the story tells how, being ill, and left alone with the baby while everyone was busy haymaking, he saw the cradle roll over, and could not stir to pick it up: but sang from his bed;—

"Here we lie  
In woeful plight,  
Halldór and I  
Men of no might;  
Youth ails thee  
But thou'lt win through it:  
Age ails me,  
And I must rue it."

The verse must have become a household word, for he used nearly the same words on another occasion, when Halldór was a grown lad, and his own increasing age had encouraged a grasping brother-in-law to play the master in his house. The tottering old man and the boy sallied out and met Vali on the hillside opposite, along which our path runs. They attacked and killed him, and he was buried on the spot, ever since called Valafall. We noticed an untouched cairn there, sunk nearly level with the ground, evidently of the type so often proved to be an ancient interment.

In plate 121, Valafall is the terrace or shelf of land under the crags on the left. The stone in the foreground is Bersi's altar, partly walled on three sides, and close to the ruins of his temple, a building which has been 22 feet long by 13 broad. In one part of the homefield is a plot 40 feet by 26 on a sloping bank, which he consecrated to the god, vowing that it should never be mown: and such is the curious persistence of tradition that it still remains year after year untouched by the farmer's scythe.





120. BESSA-TUNGA.

It was at Bessa-tunga that Steingerd lived, Kormak's too idealized lady-love, during her married life with Bersi. At last he was maimed in fight, and she took advantage of it to leave him, but not for the sake of marrying her truest admirer. The saga says that Bersi, being troubled by the attacks of his enemies in private feuds, built a stone wall round his house, and afterwards when the wall was out of repair, rebuilt it. Such fortification was unusual, and there do not seem to be any remains that can be identified with it, though the *tún* is surrounded with its garth of turf and stones.





Valafall to left hand: Tjaldanes, Hvol, Brekka: Bersi's Altar-stone

# 131. LOOKING DOWN THE VALLEY FROM BESSA-TUNGA:

Down the valley to the left is Hvitadal, a branch of the main valley of Saurbæ with its farm on a tongue of land near a fine cascade in a ravine. Here Kjartan came on his last ride, to fulfil an errand of good nature for an old woman who had asked him to fetch some cloth that was owing to her; and on getting his promise and finding out his plans she told the Bathstead folk, and so enabled them to lie in wait for him.

Nearer, on the right, is Brekka, on a steep moraine bank over the river; the property of Bersi's wife Thordis, married after Steingerd's divorce. On the same side in the distance



122. HVÓL.

is Hvól which in this sketch is given as it appears from Hvitadal, under enormous cliffs of trap rock. This place may have been the Múli, mentioned in Kormak's saga as the rendezvous of the Saurbæ folk after their raid into Midfjord to carry off Steingerd, and the scene of Kormak's altercation with Bersi when the arrangements for the famous holmgang were made. Möbius, the recent editor of Kormak (1886) thinks that Hvól is the Valastadir of the saga, and that the ancient Múli is the modern Nedri Múli.

Farther still, and out on the seashore, is Tjaldanes with the Orrustu-hólmi (orrest, or fight holm) where Bersi killed Steingerd's brother Thorkel the Toothgnasher.



123. OLAFSDAL.

From Hvol the path turns round the crags to the right, and takes us up Gilsfjord, a fine narrow loch with varied banks running right into the heart of the mountain chain which forms the backbone of the country, and though nearly cut through by Gilsfjord and Bitrufjord, joins the "duck's head" to the mainland of Iceland. Our stopping place was the fine modern house which now forms a technical school of agriculture at Olafsdal, accommodating some forty students. The place though to-day showing what energy and method can do for the soil, is one of the oldest of sites; for a Landnáms-man settled on the green hillock to the left of the present building, and gave his name to this picturesque valley.





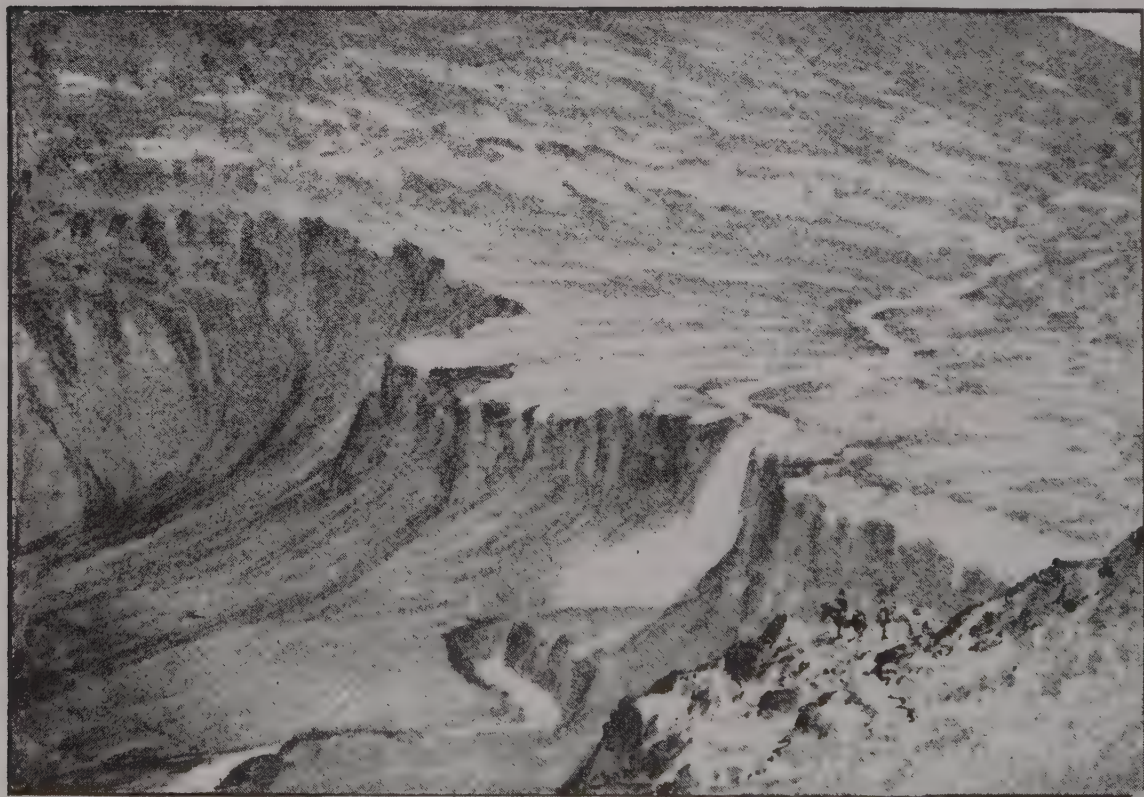
124. GARPSDAL.

Opposite Olafsdal, across Gilsfjord, is the place where Gudrún lived for a while, as the seat of her first husband Thorvald, the Godi or temple priest of Garpsdal. She was only fifteen when she was married to him; already a spoiled child and a young lady of extravagant and independent temper. It was no surprise when after two years of married life she left him and returned home to Bathstead.

The path along the shore between Olafsdal and the head of the fjord is about as fine in point of scenery as anything of the sort can be. It winds up and down under cliffs, sometimes on the beach, sometimes among huge detached rocks where dykes or harder metal seam the mountain sides; and there is no failure, before or behind, of the lofty forms that throng around the contrasting quietude of green pastures and still waters.



The main highway between Hrutafjord and the west, though longer and more difficult passes are practicable, is across the isthmus from Gilsfjord to Bitra. On the map it looks like a mere ride of five miles—and one expects that such an isthmus would turn out to be a well-marked depression, with an easy "col" of no great height, dividing sea from sea. But in fact it is a lofty range of precipitous mountains which at first sight look utterly inaccessible. Above the head of the fjord the farm of Kleifar (like Claife at Windermere "cliffs") is perched under an amphitheatre of huge cliffs, down which comes a great waterfall, Gullfoss (Goldforce—not to be confounded with the Gullfoss known to tourists beyond the Geysir). A narrow track zigzags up the cliffs, ingeniously winding from cranny to cranny until it reaches a rugged table land from which, in fine weather, a noble prospect must be seen. We passed it in rain and fog, and nothing more bewildering and impressive could be conceived. The gradual rise to the height of the fall—the continued climb above it, until



125. THE GULLFOSS OF KLEIFAR.

what had seemed an enormous cataract dwindled into a tiny spout beneath our feet; the plunge into thick darkness of the cloud, winding round the looming rocks, crossing sudden tracks of snow, fording torrents icy cold that roar over endless wastes of shattered stones, threading the way through trackless bogs of black peat to the cairn that marks the highest point—and then the long downward ride, jolting over the rugged path until the cloud thinned, and parted, and broke, revealing a gloomy glen with vast sides of ruin converging to its thundering gorge. It has hardly been suggested in writing—unless in the fancied terrors of the passage beyond the Uttermost House in the “Glittering Plain” of William Morris. One realized what folk meant once when they talked of the horror of the hills—the words we often smile at nowadays, with our engineered highway, and hotel in the foreground. Here we saw travelling as it used to be; and it was a wet and weary couple that came down the pass that afternoon to receive the hospitality of Snartartunga and Ospakseyri.



Thauðbúdal on the left: Ospakseyri on the right.

Bitrufjord or Bitra, named from its first settler, Thorbjörn Bitra, is the fjord that runs up from the Arctic Sea to meet Gilsfjord—and fails by so little of cutting Iceland in two. Lying on the highway from one district to another it naturally finds frequent mention in the sagas.

Snartartunga at the head of the loch was the place where—says Kormak's saga—lived Odd the fisherman and his pretty daughter Steinvör Slim-ankles. In the next valley, Thambardal, to the left in our sketch, a rough old sailor Thórarin lived with three sons as rough as he. Thorarin carried off Steinvör, and her father was powerless to save her: and so went to Bersi to ask for help. One day Bersi rode alone to Thambardal, met Steinvör at the door and told her he was come to rescue her. But as he would not have his journey for nothing, he strode up to the door and knocked. Out rushed Thorarin with a knife—only to fall under the famous sword. Then Bersi took the lass on his horse and rode off—not, it seems, by the coast road, but over the mountains. In a narrow pass he was overtaken, but killed his pursuers one after another, and so won the girl,—whom he declined to restore to her father. It was she who served as nurse to his foster child Halldór, Kjartan's brother.

On the opposite side of the fjord is Óspakseyri—the Ere or promontory fortified by Óspak ("Ere-dwellers," LVII to LXII) captain of a gang of rascals who murdered and robbed with impunity. Rough as men were in heathen days, robbery from neighbours was not in the rules of their game; and at last Snorri the Priest, now settled at Sælingsdal, took the matter in hand, and led eighty men against the fort on the Ere. From the story of the assault it would seem that the wall was high—"Thrand the strider made a run at it and leaped up so high that he got his axe hooked over it, and drew himself up by the axe shaft till he came up on the fort." It was a solid wall, too, for Óspak "when he cast stones would go right out on to the wall." He ventured out once too often and was shot and fell outside the fort; and so Snorri "made a clean sweep of all that evil company, and then went home." Nothing now remains of their famous battlements; perhaps, like so many sites on the shore, it has been carried away into the fjord.

At right angles to Bitra, and reached by an easy path over the headland that divides them, is Hrútafjord, known to the English reader as "Ram-firth." It is a straight and narrow loch, about twenty four miles long, with shores not so mountainous as would be guessed from the approach to it: for we have passed the backbone of the land, and the hills sink in size east of the spine of peaks that run due north from Baula by Tröllakirkja and the isthmus. And yet the western side of Hrútafjord is extremely interesting—especially near the mouth at Borg, where castle-like rocks mingle grandly with the shoreward pastures; and homesteads—poor but picturesque—nestle by the little rivers that tumble into the calm fjord.





127. MIDFJORD AND HRÚTA-FJORD.

Rather more than halfway down Hrútafjord it was old use and wont to cross the water in a boat, so making a pretty straight line between Hvammsfjord through Laxárdal and over the heath, towards the Dales of the north country. A lively scene in the saga describes Kormak's chase after Bersi and his lost love Steingerd: how he came to the shore, to find that an old witch who owed him a grudge had scuttled all the boats. He prevailed on her to lend him one—at an exorbitant price; but it filled when they were scarcely off the shore—and they had hard work to get back to land: and then she demanded her price—Kormak's brother bargaining with her—offering half, and finally “splitting the difference.” So they had to ride round the head of the fjord—which would add a couple of hours to the journey and of course make the chase hopeless.





Trölla-kirkja.

Hrútafjord.

Thórodds-stadir.

# 128. BORDEYRI.

Bordeyri and Thóroddsstadir, where we crossed in a boat, lie opposite one another; the former mentioned in "Grettir" as the home of Thorkel—the latter of Thorbjörn, grandson to the settler who gave his name to the place. "Thorbjörn was a great and hardy warrior, but he was noted as being worse at getting servants than other men; he gave very poor wages, nor was he thought a good man to deal with. There was a kinsman of his hight Thorbjörn and bynamed Tardy: he was a sailor, and the namesakes were partners. He was a fault-finding fellow, and went about jeering at most men"! Such was the gossip of the countryside nine hundred years ago.

In the distance to the left rise the snowy peaks of Tröllakirkja, "giants' kirk." Bordeyri is now a thriving port and trading place, where up-country folk come to market.



120. THE RIVER OF MIDFJORD.

Kormak's own home had been founded by his father on the Meols, as the gravelly shore-banks would be called on the coast of Lancashire, and was thence called Mel, now Melstad. It overlooks Midfjord, and beyond the fjord's mouth the precipitous coast of Hornstrandir, the strand which trends northward to the Horn, the cape of the north-west. The immediate surroundings of Melstad are open and bare, but the panorama is wide, and every section of it has some distant point of interest; for even Eiríks-jökul appears, far away to the south, rising in a clear white dome over the heath.

Beneath Eiríks-jökul are the low hills of Nupsdal, the dale in which Kormak's Steingerd









130. MELSTAD AND REYKIR.

was born and bred; where he first saw her, peeping in through the carved doorway between the firelight and the afterglow; and for a while the course of true love ran smooth. Down in the Midfjord valley the river wanders wide, a great torrent spreading itself out into many channels between beds of shingle, and confined only by steep banks of glacial drift, above which the moorland and pasturage slope gradually up to the hills that back them.

On the hill to the left was Bjarg, the home of Grettir the Strong; a neighbour but not a friend of Kormak and his family. The feud began by a quarrel at a horse-fight on Langafit,—Lang-*feet* or meadow, as in Westmorland we have Langfits, Colwith feet, Mints feet, etc.; and the battle between the two houses which took place on the hause we have passed in coming from Hrútafjord, is described in the 30th chapter of Grettir's saga.

Turning round to the north from this last point of view we look out towards Melstad on the hill to the left, and over Langafit in the valley to Reykir on the edge of the hill to the right. Reykir is so named from the 'reek' of hot springs, though other evidences of active or recent volcanic power are wanting: the rock is indeed like our English "Borrowdale series" the output of submarine craters of the Silurian age, but there are no lava fields nor cinder cones here; all is bedded, sculptured mountain formation as in the Dales and in the North West and North of Iceland generally.

Reykir was the first settlement in Midfjord, taken by Skeggi ("Beardie") who owned the magic sword Sköfnung, borrowed by Kormak for his holmgang on Leidholm: and the place is often named in both Kormak's and Grettir's lives.

## XI. VIDIDAL AND VATNSDAL ;

### BARDI'S CASTLE TO GLÁM'S CAIRN.

The story of the Heath-slayings, *Heidar-víga saga*, as we have it now is a fragment, of which the greater part was lost in a fire at Copenhagen in 1728. It tells how Styr, of the Berserk's lava, came by his death, and how Snorri the Priest took up the bloodfeud for him against the men of Borgarfjörð, and how the vendetta went on from slaughter to slaughter in its pedigree of death until Bardi, a Lob-lie-by-the-fire of folk-lore, came out as a champion. Aided by his foster-father, Thórarin of Laekjarmót in Víðidal (we might English the name Becker-met in Withydale), he led a band of eighteen men into the valley of the Hvítá for



131. BORGARVIRKI: SOUTH-WEST END.





132. BORGARVIRKI: NORTH-EAST END.

revenge. He retreated to the heath between Hvítár-síða and Víðidal, the Two-days' heath, and there won a famous battle, some time between 1013 and 1021. The importance of the event was not in the number of men fighting or slain, but in the fact that it was the first approach to anything like civil war in Iceland. Feuds were common and private fighting frequent; but in this affair so many noble families were involved that the general peace between North and South was threatened.

The White-water folk turned out in force, and marched to the Heath one hundred strong. From them Bardi fled; and then, before the happy ending of general amnesty, there is a gap in the manuscript. This gap is filled by a local tradition written down in the 17th century, to the effect that Bardi and his men built, and held successfully against all the South, the fortress of Borgarvirki, the Burg-work, in Víðidal.

The tradition has been studied, and the place described with a sketch plan, by Dr. Björn M. Olsen, Rector of the College at Reykjavik, in a paper in the Yearbook of the Iceland Antiquarian Society for 1880-1881; and he concludes that the fortress was used by Bardi.

It is formed out of a curious natural feature, a castle almost ready made. An isolated hill, 800 feet above sea, stands conspicuous in the undulating open valley, with vertical walls of well-marked basalt pillars. The natural ramparts have been built up and strengthened at the crest with rough masonry of great slabs, so that assault must have been impossible even at the weakest points.

Our plan is based upon that mentioned above.



133. BORGARVIRKI: PLAN.



134. BORGARVIRKI: INTERIOR.

Inside this oval block of stone is a depression which at first sight looks like a crater with its vent to one side. That it is not a true crater is obvious from the absence of lava: it is one of the freaks of basalt. But it forms a castle-court with walls of enormous thickness as well as exterior steepness; the gateway walled across and strengthened by building; and two long halls, side by side, of the same cyclopean work, under shelter of the lofty ramparts. Near these dwelling houses is a well, now choked up, but once affording the garrison their water-supply without risk or trouble.

From the top there is a wide look-out: to the south Eiríks-jökul in the far distance, over the heath where the battle took place; on the left of the jökul the valley is seen in all its details and the Vidídal mountains rising behind. Behind us to the west is Vesturhöpavatn backed by hills, and to the east the great lake of the Hópur. The warders of Borgarvirki could keep the most perfect watch, and for their defence no better place could be imagined.





135. MOUNTAINS OF VÍDIDAL FROM STÓRA-BORG.

We cannot leave this neighbourhood without a word for the beautiful and graceful group of mountains which we have already seen in the far distance from Arnarvatn. Here they rise above the broad valley in leaping lines and deeply cloven ravines, somewhat Skiddaw-like. The farm of Stóra-borg, great Borg, to distinguish it from Litla-borg not far away and from the Borg of Egril Skallagrimsson, gets its name from the castle. It is now one of the finest and most prosperous in these parts, a model of what can be done with the soil and the climate of Iceland. Finnbogi, the hero of the late Finnboga saga, who carried on feuds with the men of Vatnsdal, lived here.





136. JÖRUNDAR-FELL AND THE LAKE OF VATNSDAL.

To the left of these hills as seen in the last view the valley of Vatnsdal runs southward up into the Heath. It gets its name from the little lake near its mouth, a quiet tarn under the range that forms one side of the valley, over against the Vidídal group. The highest summit is called Jörundarfell, named from the early settler Jörund, whose advent is recorded in the *Vatnsdæla* saga, one of the Icelandic stories which still wait for a translation into English. At the mouth of the valley is a group of hillocks, like a chaos of shot rubbish on a bit of waste land, and highly interesting to geologists, who have disputed whether they are glacial or volcanic. These are the hills of Vatnsdal, which the proverb already quoted (p. 49) names as innumerable.



137. HVAMM IN VATNSDAL.

As we advance along the rich meadows of the dale, Jörundarfell rises grandly over a magnificent façade of contorted beds of rock, like a bit of the Savoy Alps in general aspect, though not identical in geology. Among the incidents of the valley there is a pretty waterfall, another Nant d'Arpennaz or Staubbach, hanging from the cliffs,—losing itself half way down in spray, and finding itself again in a stream collected out of the thin fringe of falling rain, in which the iris shines distinct in the afternoon against the black background of the gill. Under the combe or *hvam* formed by the contorted and dislocated strata is the farm called Hvamm seated on a green hill above broad meadows through which the river winds pastorally—in striking contrast with the wild scenery above it.









138. KORNSÄ.

The saga of Vatnsdal tells how Ingimund the Old came out from Norway (A.D. 890) and after naming Hrútafjord and Víðidal at last discovered this valley. At his first halting place a daughter, Thordís, was born to him, and so he called that place by her name, and went forward. Finally he settled in a gap between great ancient moraines, long since grassed over, in the higher reach of the dale, where as three wizard Finns in Norway had indicated, he found a silver image of Frey, which he had lost in Norway: the spot is seen in the distance of our sketch, beneath Jórundarfell across the river. There he built a temple 120 feet long, a great work, from which the place was named Hof; and there most of the action of the story centres. One of his daughters, Jórún, was the mother of Kjartan's wife Hrefna, who wore the coil of gold that was meant for Guðrún, and innocently caused the greatest tragedy of northern story.

Thordís, Ingimund's daughter, on her marriage brought the land of Kornsa or Karnsa to her husband Hallorm. His son Thorgrím, the temple priest at Kornsa, was the father of a child which, according to a right then falling into disuse, he refused to rear and left out in the snow to die. The neighbours thought it a shame, and found the baby: it had scratched the snow away from its face, making a fight for life, and that pleased them. They thought it augured well, and named the lad Thorkel Krafla—"Scratch." He was bred up by these friends, and became the hero of the valley. During his wandering years, for most young Icelanders went abroad to see the world, he entered the service of Sigurd earl of Orkney. Once, says the saga, they made a raid into Scotland; and when they came back to the ship the earl asked how many men were missing. Thorkel seemed to be the only one . . . . . The earl bade them go and search for him, and they found him in a glade of the forest with his back to an oak-tree. Two men beset him, and four lay dead at his feet . . . . . The earl asked what he had been doing. Said he, "I heard you say we should run ashore as hard as we could, but not that we were to flee back again like hunted men." Then the earl asked who were the people he was fighting. He said he had gone to a castle, "and when I got there, a few stones tumbled off the wall, and there I found booty,—a good bit; and then the castle folk saw it and set after me, and there was a bit of a fight." He seemed rather annoyed at his rescue.

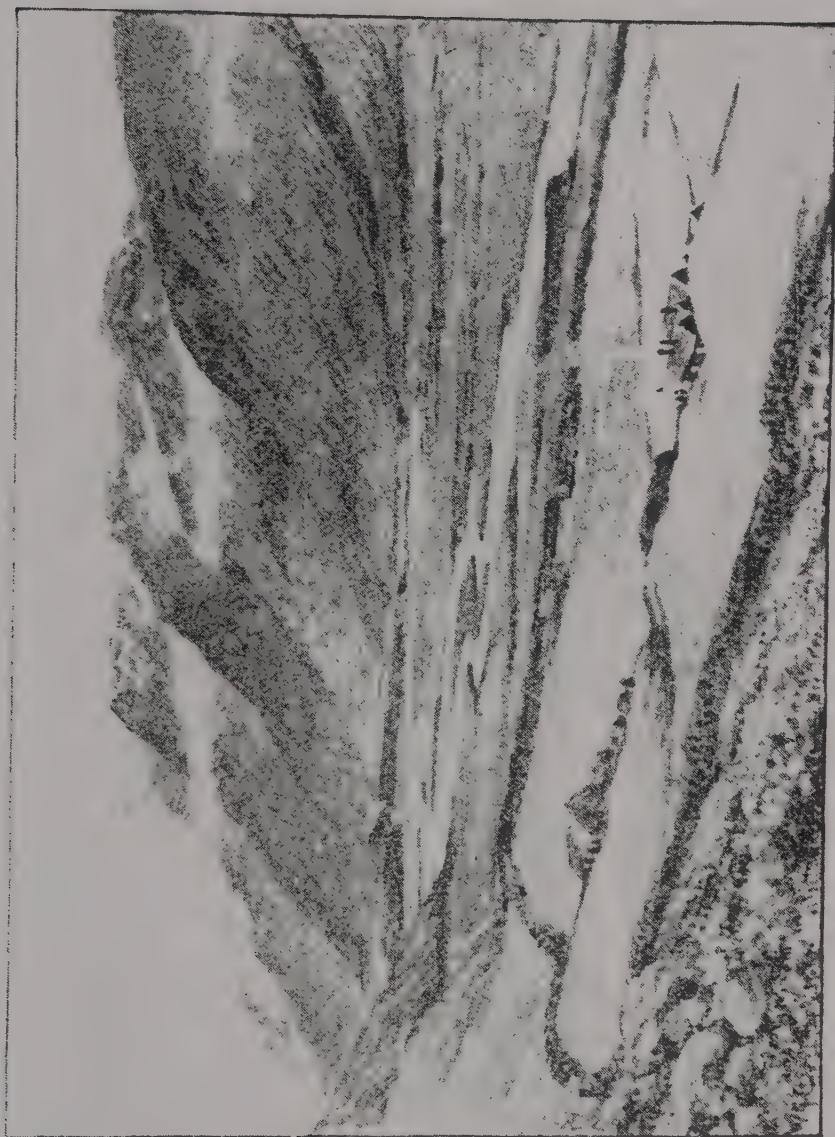
Another reckless character sprang from this dale. The saga says "Óttar lived at Grímsunga and married Asdís daughter of Olaf from Haukagil. Their son was Hallfred the troublesome Skald," who plays a great part in the story of King Olaf Tryggvason: everyone knows his song in Longfellow's "Saga of King Olaf":—

"I am called

The Unappalled:

Nothing hinders me or daunts me."

At Grímsunga, now a pretty and wealthy farm, the valley forks. To the right a deep gorge goes up, gradually losing itself in the heath or desert uplands over which lies the path to Eiríks-jökul and the south. To the left is a green glen, not made particularly striking by any salient features, but lonely and retired; its depth narrowed by steep and dark hillsides—the Shady vale, Forsælu-dal, it is called; and drained by a broad and swift river coming down from the wastes. The last outlying site is Thórhalls-stadir, once a rich farmstead with a church, now a group of green mounds by the river.



Joumalahel

Hof

139. VATNSDAL FROM HAUKAGIL.



140. GRIMSTUNGA.





141. THÖRHALLSSTADIR.

It was of this spot that the story of Grettir tells the famous tale of dread; how the farmer—wealthy and worthy man though he was—could never keep his shepherds because the place was haunted. At last a big ugly fellow, a stranger named Glám (Moonshine) came there. "The place is thought to be haunted," said Thórhall. "I am not afraid of ghosts," growled he; "they liven the spot up a bit." The creature feared neither God nor devil—an awful character. He would never go to church, though a church was on the spot; and at last, on Christmas Eve, when all decent people fasted, he insisted on getting his regular meals. "A pack of fools you are with your new fangled ways. Folk fared better, and *were* better, when they were heathens. Give me my breakfast without any nonsense, or it will be the worse for you."

So the mistress dare not say nay to him, and he got his breakfast, and out he went, grumbling and growling, into the snow; for it was snowing thick.

Well,—he never came back. They heard him shouting on the sheep all morning, and then it came on to snow thicker than ever, and it was a great snowstorm. They thought of searching for him at night after the Christmas Eve service, but it was no good in that snow.

Christmas Day came, and they ventured out. The sheep were all lost in the drifts, and away up the dale they found huge footprints, as if a barrel had been stamped down in the snow. The tracks led to a spot where awful wrestling had gone forward—stones and earth hurled about; and near by was Glám—dead, as black as hell and swollen as big as a bullock. They couldn't get him to the kirkyard—not with ropes and horses, and when the priest went with them they could never find the corpse. At last they got him laid under cairn.

But he walked. Some who met him swooned, and some went raving mad. Just after Twelfth-night he took to riding the roof and nigh broke it down. Nobody would stay at the homestead. The old ghost never came any more, but all his strength seemed to have gone into Glám.

Well, time and again the farmer tried to get a new shepherd, but nobody would risk it. At last he got a great rough fellow, as strong as any two, who laughed when he heard the roof ridden. But come Christmas Eve he went out in the snow—and they found him next day at Glám's cairn with his neck broken and every bone in his body smashed.

Next it was the faithful old cowherd. He would not leave the spot and the work he had looked after for years. But one dark winter morning he went to the byre to milk the cows—and there was a terrible noise—and when daylight came they found him with his head in one stall and his heels in the next, and his back broken across the flagstones that made the wall between.

When spring came the farmer tried once more, and through the light nights it was pretty quiet; but when autumn evenings came the farmer's daughter was killed. Folk said all the dale would be deserted if this went on.

One day Grettir the Strong came riding to Thorhall-stead, and said he meant to stay awhile. The farmer warned him that he would lose his horse at least—but he said there were

plenty more. And that night Glám kept off. Next night, too, all was quiet; but in the morning they found Grettir's horse dead, with every bone in him broken. The farmer bade him begone, for it would be his turn next. "Nay," said Grettir. "I must not have less for my horse than a look at Glám."

So in the evening he would not go to bed, but lay on a bench in the hall with a rug wrapped tight round him. Everything in the hall was broken—you must know—by Glám: the door was smashed; the bits of it were just set up in the gap to keep the wind out. The wainscot was burst; all the seats and beds were torn away; and the whole place wrecked.

There was a lamp burning, and Grettir lay awake. When a third of the night was gone, he heard a great noise, as of somebody riding the roof, kicking his heels against the thatch so that every rafter cracked again. At last he saw the door open, and in came the monster, slowly creeping. It reared itself up to the roof and laid its arms on the cross-beam and glared over. Then it saw what lay on the seat, and stalked up the hall and laid hold of the rug. Grettir set his foot against a beam and it pulled again, but Grettir would not stir. Third time it tugged with both hands and tore the rug. It stood staring for a moment at the torn bit—and Grettir was up and gripping it round to break its back: and there was a terrible fight up and down the hall: the thing trying to get away, and Grettir clinging to it with might and main, setting his heels against anything that would hold, and breaking everything in the struggle.

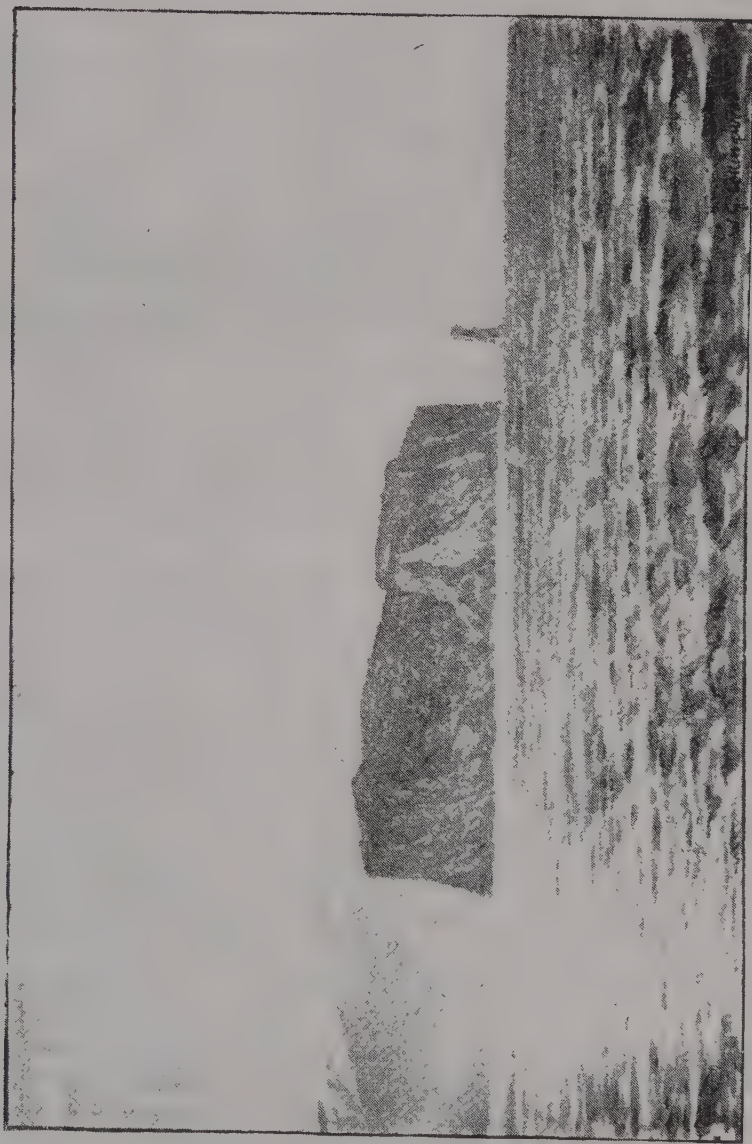
At last they got to the door, and just as the ghost was gathering up strength to drag Grettir out, Grettir let go with a rush and down they came, bursting through door-cheeks and lintel and frozen thatch—into the moonlight on the snow. The dead eyes rolled up in agony, glaring ghastly in the moonlight—and the dead thing spoke:—"Thou hast sought me and found me. Thou hast conquered me—but I curse thee. Hitherto thou hast been a hero—henceforth thou shalt be a coward. Evermore these eyes of mine shall haunt those eyes of thine, and drag thee down to thy death."

And this, says the saga, is why folk say Glám gives glamour—when things seem other than they are.





142. PRANGLEY FROM THE SOUTH.



143. DRANGEY AND THE KERLING  
looking up Skagafjord.

## XII. NORTH AND EAST FJORDS :

### GRETTIR THE STRONG AND VÍGA-GLÚM.

The curse of Glám was fulfilled in Drangey, where Grettir was at last surprised and slain, after a career of adventure, even in those adventurous days unmatched.

Drangey is an island in Skagafjord, a mass of rock rising some hundreds of feet above the sea, precipitous on all sides, like Geirshólmi in Hvalfjord, only much larger in scale. Like Geirshólmi it had only one ascent, so difficult, the saga says, "that no one could climb it except with ladders; and when the topmost ladder was withdrawn, nobody could get up." The cliffs were full of birds in summer, and there were eighty sheep on the island, owned by farmers who lived on the shores of the firth.

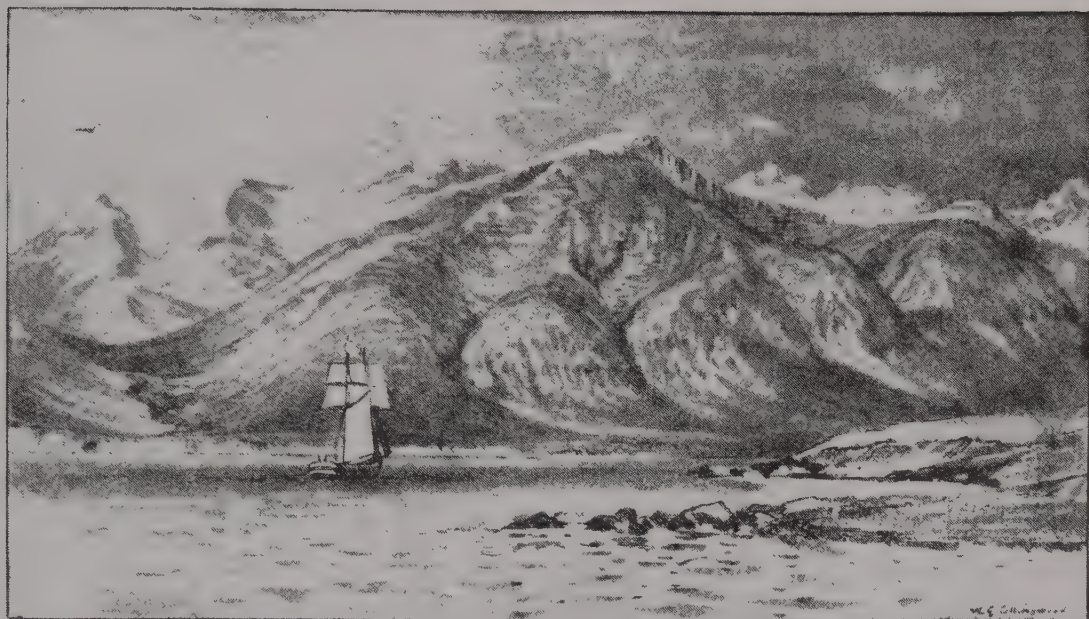
Near it, a tall and narrow pinnacle of rock, the Kerling, "Carline," stands in the sea to the south; another, the Karl, is on the north; otherwise Drangey is solitary at the mouth of the fjord, open to the Arctic Sea. The nearest land is at the farm of Reykir, another of the many places called after hot springs, about four miles from the island.

As we steamed into the fjord, rolling in the swell of the open sea after rough weather, the sunset died away in purple and rosy light on the hills, and gave place to a cold blue twilight, with a moon that silvered the snowy summits. Drangey stood grim and grey upon the water, seeming unapproachable, with bare sides and bare top, the most inhospitable of abodes.

Here Grettir the Strong took refuge after fifteen or sixteen years of outlawry—"as Sturla Thordson has said": modern critics make out the time to have been shorter,—but of the historical fact there is no doubt, however confused it may be with forgotten chronology and scraps of marvellous folklore foisted on the story.

The curse worked in this way,—that Grettir could never be alone in the dark. He was always haunted by the eyes. He took one and another companion in his exile from human intercourse, but no one proved faithful to him. At last he found a servant, a merry fool who promised to cheer his melancholy, and known by the name of Glaum (which means jolly bustling, as at a feast). Grettir's brother Illugi joined them, and they built a hut on the island—fed on the sheep—and as long as the ladders were looked after, defied the world. But after four years the sheep were nearly all killed;—Glaum's merriment turned to mutiny, and Grettir was brought to death's door by a wound he had given himself, which mortified. This, folk thought, could never have happened but by witchcraft. It was a witch who had cut runes on the drift-wood and rubbed blood on it, and walked withershins round it, and laid spells on it, and driven it out to sea for Grettir's bane. It was the fool Glaum who brought up the log and teased Grettir into chopping it, and so he came by his mishap. And while he lay in a frightful condition of gangrene, with his brother hanging over him in despairing devotion, the rascally Glaum—half knave and half idiot—snored on the grass, leaving the ladders down and the approach open to the enemy. They were not long in taking advantage of their opportunity. With a large party they climbed the ladders, captured Glaum, overpowered Illugi and slew the dying Grettir.





144. UPSA-STRAND FROM HRISEY.

The next great fjord of the north is Eyjafjord—Isle firth—so called from the large island of Hrisey (Copse isle) lying in the middle of the waterway at about a third of the distance between the mouth and the head of the loch. The western shore of this lower reach, before you come to the island, is called Upsa-strand (*ups* is the same word as 'eaves' and sometimes applied to a mountain side like this long scarred slope above a steep from which the streams descend like eavesdroppings).

At Upsir, under the eaves, the great valley of Svarfadardal (from Thorstein Svarfad, the Sweeper, who settled it), branches off, running far back into the mountains.

Then the fjord narrows, and runs on for about ten miles until another valley meets it, parallel with Svarfadardal, and called Hörgárdal from the hörg or sacred place at Hof near its mouth. The fjord narrows again and tapers off to its head, near which is Akureyri, the modern trading place, a village or town second only in importance to Reykjavik.

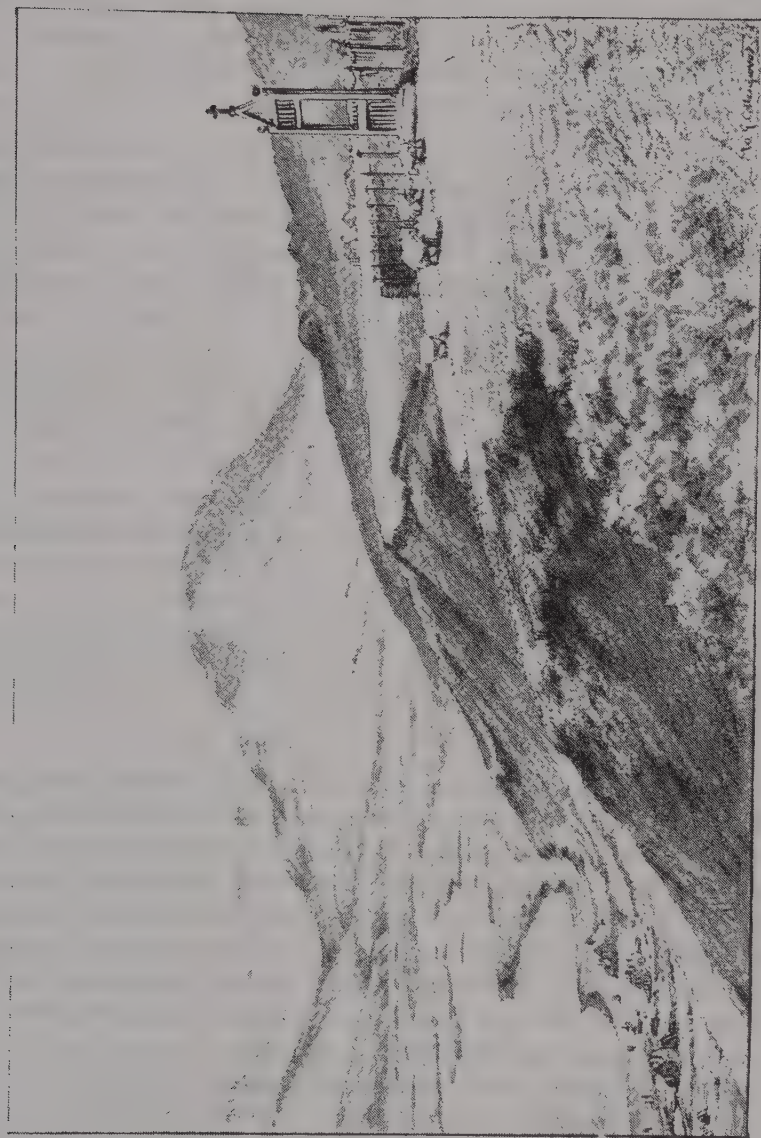
The whole length of the fjord—about forty miles—is walled in with mountains, some of them snow-capped, though not so precipitous as much of the coast of the west and





145. HÖRGÁRDAL IN EYJAFJORD.

the east. The actual shore is lined with huge banks of moraine. In our sketch of Akureyri the churchyard stands on such a bank, some hundreds of feet above the strip of foreshore on which the town is built. In the gills of these moraines—opening to east and south—there is warmth and shelter, though the fjord looks toward the Arctic sea, and drift ice sometimes floats into it even in summer. But the climate is far from rigorous. In the gardens round the neat wooden houses—more picturesque and better kept than in most parts of Iceland—tall sunflowers were blooming in August, and the rowan trees of Akureyri are almost too famous; for the mention of them by so many travellers suggests that no trees exist or can exist elsewhere in this country—which is far from true. Only wanton waste has robbed Iceland of its woods, which, in protected and sheltered spots, can grow to a very fair size, and certainly did so of old.



Kaupang.      Thverá.      Sites of Viga Glims Saga in the distance.      Espihol.      Grund Mofrufell.

146. AKUREYRI ON EYJAFJORD: looking south from the churchyard gate.

It was in the valleys shown in this view from the churchyard of Akureyri that most of the action of Víga-Glúm's saga went on.

Helgi the Lean, Glúm's greatgrandfather, was the original settler, coming with his wife Thórun, sister of Queen Aud, to Svarfadardal at first. Afterwards moving up the fjord to its head, and fixing on a home near hot springs, he called it Krists-nes (Christ's ness) for he was a Christian, though, says Landnáma, "much mixed as to his religion. He believed in Christ, but prayed to Thor when he was at sea or in difficulties."

One of his daughters married Narfí of Hrísey, and another married Hámund, son of King Hjör. Their son Thórir married the daughter of Cathal—notice how Gaelic names and Celtic blood mixed with the Norse in many parts of Iceland—and they lived at Espihól (aspen hill—like Esps in the English Lake District) near Kristsnes. This family spread up the valley to Grund and Mödrufell (Madder-fell) and got into feud with the other branch to which Glúm belonged, which remained at the entrance of the Thverá—a little river falling into the larger valley near the head of the fjord—it is seen in our sketch on the left hand of the picture. In the valley running up to the right—and partly hidden by the foreground, are Kristsnes, Haukagil, Stokkahladir, Grund, Mödrufell, Djúpídal—one after another.

Glúm's mother Astríd was a noble Norwegian lady, but was left a widow on a small estate. Her powerful neighbours of Espihól tried all they could to get her land—a Naboth's vineyard to them: until Glúm—who had been the lazy Jack of the family—suddenly woke up to energy, and took the law into his own hands by killing his oppressor. This was the beginning of a stirring career in which he was for twenty years leading man in the district, by the simple process of murdering everyone who opposed him. He is not an engaging character, compared with many of the saga-heroes; but some of the incidents in the story are worth recalling in view of the sites where they happened.

It was at the hot baths of Hrafnagil between Kristsnes and Espihól that Thorgrím and others of Glúm's enemies were sitting one day, when his friend Arnór Redcheek set out with a train of pack-horses to fetch certain sacks of malt imported from abroad, and lying on the shore at Gásar (on the left in the view of Hörgárdal). Now Arnór had cut out Thorgrím in a love affair; and when it was heard that he was at the ford, Thorgrím and his companions were delighted at their chance. "Is not this lucky now? We'll get the malt if we lose the maid!" So they rushed at him, and he floundered into the river and over—leaving his packhorses. "We shall drink the bride-ale," said Thorgrím, "if we don't wed the bride," and away home. Thorgrím's father was old and blind, and asked why they were so merry; and when he heard the story exclaimed, "It's no laughing matter. Do you think Glúm will let you sleep quietly when he knows what you have done? Get your men together at once—you may be certain that Glúm is on the march with his." So they got eighty men together and at daybreak met Glúm with sixty men at the ford—which, says the saga, is not passable 'now'. There was a great fight, which was stopped by the intervention of neighbours; and the contention ended for the time by the arrangement that Thorgrím should marry the sister of Arnór's bride.

Stokkahladir (Stock-laithe or wooden barn) is the next farm to Hrafnagil. There lived one Kalf. He was at a horsefight at Djúpídal (Deepdale) higher up the valley, and in the excitement of the contest struck Glúm's servant Ingólf with his stick; and Glúm—this is characteristic of him—plotted revenge on Kalf, and a snub to Ingólf to whom he owed a grudge for going a-courting instead of minding his business. And this is how he managed it. "Go to your sweetheart's father," said he, "and tell him you have killed Kalf." "But I haven't." "Never mind," said Glúm, "come into the laithe (barn). Kill that calf:—now you can tell him, and tell him the truth." Which Ingólf did. Meanwhile Glúm went over to Stokkahladir and killed Kalf himself; and when it was known, Ingólf got the blame and was to be prosecuted for the crime. He fled the country; but when the case came on, Glúm coolly stood up in court, and said "You are prosecuting the wrong man. It was I. Ingólf did kill a calf in a stocklaithe—and it was not for me to deny the rumour. Your suit is null and void, and I am now free to offer atonement." And so he got off with a trifle of blood money.

After twenty years of such life, Nemesis came upon Glúm through the more violent and less crafty dealing of his younger son. He was forced to leave his estate, and lived in Hörgárdal, whence he had taken his wife; and for another twenty years saw his fortunes declining. But he was still a man of importance—and once had to hold the Thing at the Thingstead near Kaupang (at the head of the fjord). His enemies, with superior numbers, opposed his landing from his boats, and there was a battle among the traders' booths, graphically described in the saga, with much local detail:—

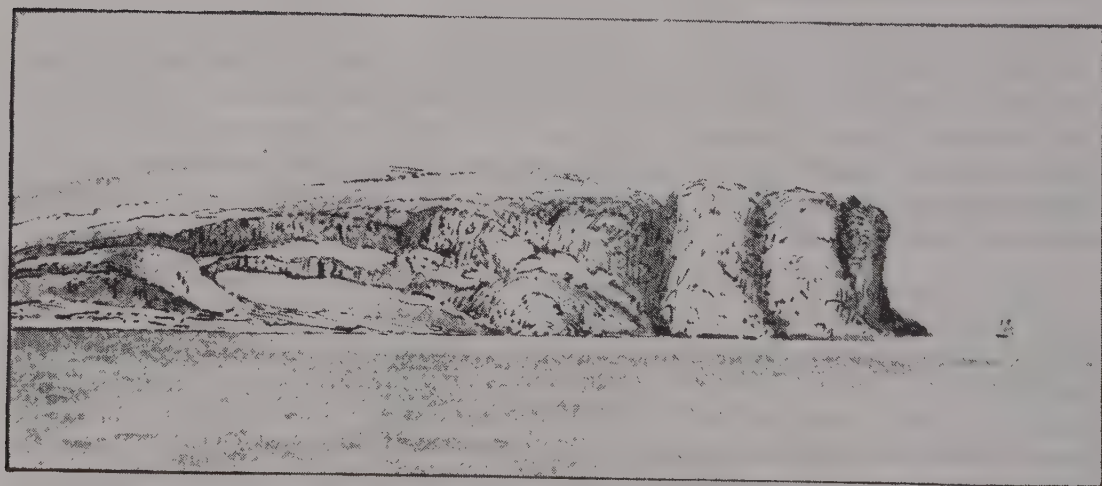
"Now between the firth and the booths are steep slopes, covered with loose gravel. When Glúm came near Einar's booth men rushed out upon his company, dashing their shields at them to force them down the hill. Glúm fell and rolled over and over down the sandy foreshore. He was not wounded, and held on to his shield, in which three spears had stuck. Thorvald Tafalld was just landing, and saw Glúm's plight; he leapt ashore with his oar and hurled it at Gudmund the Strong. The oar broke his shield, and struck him on the chest, and he fell down in a swoon and was carried by his men into his booth. Then they fought, casting weapons and stones. The fight was hard and many were wounded, but all agreed that so small a party as Glúm's could not have fought better." Glúm's enemies ridiculed his fall in scathing verses, to which he replied in a song of hearty contempt for them and theirs. But his power was on the wane, and another of his songs—shortly after—shows how the old fighting heathen felt it, when life was no more worth living. This is Sir Edmund Head's translation:—

"The world is worthless; and my life  
With all the keen delights of strife  
Hath wellnigh passed away.  
Too weak, when gallant Grim lay low,  
To strike 'mid men the avenging blow  
And blood with blood repay."

Christianity came to Iceland, and Glúm was baptized three years before his death. He was buried in the church which his son Má built in Hörgárdal, the valley of the sacred place.



Steaming out of Eyjafjord we pass Flatey, a large low island, which must not be mistaken for the famous Flatey of the monastery, already seen in Breidifjord; and in the distance to northward we see the long line of another flat island, Grimsey, across which lies the Arctic circle. One cannot quite shake off a childish hope to see something to mark so important a geographical feature, the "Line" of the North: but the country lies so low that there are no hilltops to carry snow and ice: there are only green fields and here and there a farm, very like the rest of Iceland, only *less* so; it is the *absence* of white patches in the picture that makes it remarkable, as we sail slowly along the coast on a summer's day.



147. RAUDA-GNUP: IN THE ARCTIC CIRCLE.

Leaving Húsavík, a modern trading village, we cross the Axarfjord to the shore of the great plain which forms the very northernmost part of Iceland, called Melrakka-slétta, Fox-fields, some miles farther to the north than the Horn of the North-west, and overlapping into the Arctic region. Turning the headland of Raudagnúp where the bastion-like rocks are alternately white and scarlet,—white, it seems, with the guano of innumerable wild fowl, and scarlet with bands of some red rock, hematite or conglomerate,—we are at last within the Polar Circle.

Even these northern shores were settled in the Viking Age. It was a grandson of the Orkney Earl Torf-Einar who took Axarfjord : Reist took the land thence as far as Raudagnúp, says Landnáma-book ; and beyond that the Slétta were held by one Arngeir, who, the story tells, was killed by a white bear, and when his son Odd found and killed the creature, he thereupon became a warlock. " He was so shape-strong that he went home to Hraunhöfn (Lavahaven) in the evening, and next morning was found at Thjórsárdal at his sister's house." The polar bears come occasionally to these shores, carried on the floating drift-ice, and nowadays are not allowed to wander far. They are not usually dangerous to man ; but in ancient times they seem to have strayed over the country, and many an early settler got glory by single-handed encounter with such a monster, which was feared not only for its strength, but for uncanny powers, as the story of Odd Arngeirsson and other tales prove.

As we turn southward the coast gradually rises in rocky headlands. Langa-nes is a curious promontory of vertical basalt, like a still more gigantic giant's causeway, hardly paintable, but a wonder to behold. South of that we reach the inlet of Vopnafjord, named from its first settler, Eyvind Vápnir, the weapon-bearer, who fixed his home at Krossavík on the mountainous shore opposite the less accentuated side where the modern village and trading place is situated.

The feud between two generations of Eyvind's house and the men of Hof, the Temple, up the valley, is the subject of a saga not yet translated into English, nor included in the series of popular Icelandic texts published by Sigurd Kristjánsson of Reykjavík.

Another less known, but more charming story, has its local habitation on this east coast, or rather in a great valley inland from a bay lying a little to the south of Vopnafjord. The saga of Hrafnkel, the priest of Frey—we have the name Ravenkell frequently in the north of England in 12th century documents—tells of a pious heathen who lived at Adalból in Jökulsdal, the valley of a great glacier river, and built there a temple to the god Frey. He devoted to Frey half of everything, especially a horse which he loved so much that he vowed to slay any man who rode it against his will. At last Einar, one of his men, took the horse Freyfaxi at his need, and the story tells how he paid the penalty, and how Hrafnkel thereby was involved in a vendetta which brought about a long train of adventure and misfortune. But the charm of the saga is in its prettily told descriptions of pastoral life in those heathen days, realizing every detail as brightly as any modern novel.

Along this eastern coast we must now pass hastily, seeing its bold and picturesque features only from the steamer, and stopping only at the ports. It is less renowned in saga than the South of Njál, the West of Snorri, or the North of Grettir ; though there are many stirring tales, yet untold to the English reader, about its dales and fjords, no less romantic than the grandest in Iceland.



148. VOPNA-FJORD.

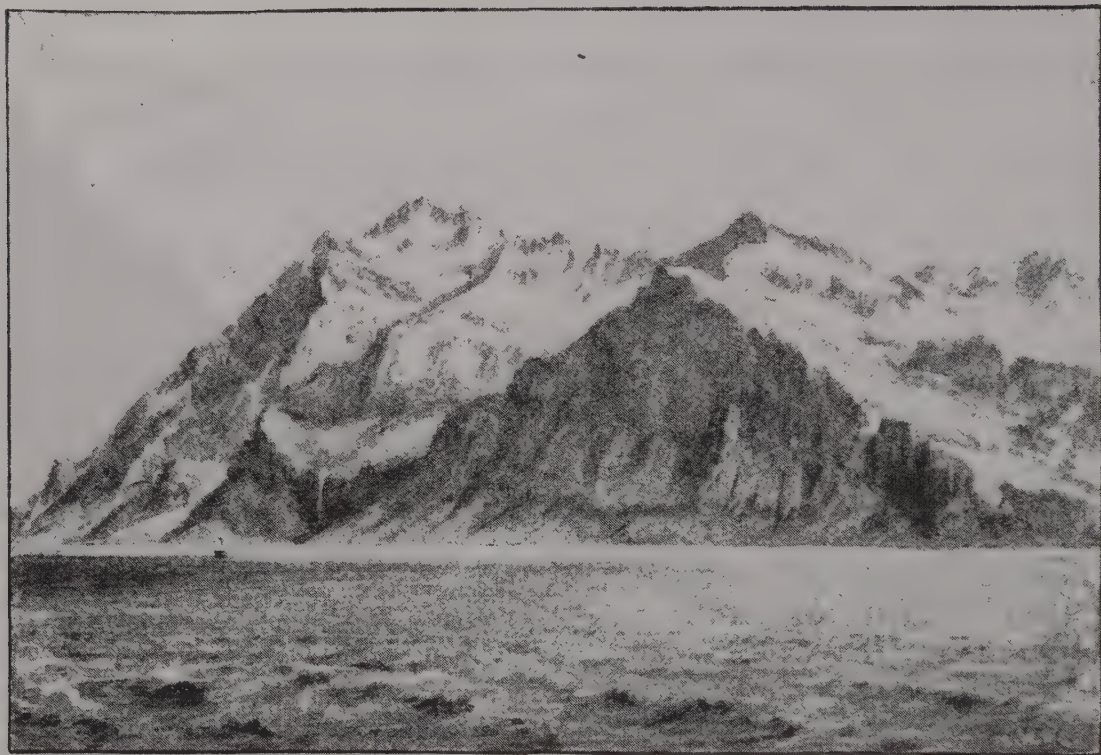


149. LODMUNDAR-FJORD.

Of Lodmundar-fjord, this tale is told in *Landnáma-book*. "Lodmund the Old was very shape-strong and a wizard. He threw overboard his high-seat pillars into the sea, and said he would settle where they came to land. He reached the shore at Lodmund's fjord and stayed there that winter: then he started to look for his high-seat pillars round the coast southward. He carried all his goods to his ship, but before the sail was set he lay down and bade no man be so bold as to speak to him. When he had lain there a little while, a great crash was heard, and men saw that a mighty landslip was falling on the homestead that Lodmund had built. After that he sat up and said, 'This is my weird, that no ship sailing out from hence shall ever come safe from sea.' He sailed south round the (eastern) Horn and westward past Hjørleif's-head, and still more to the west, and took land where his pillars had come"—at Sólheimar, where we have already heard of his magic dealings in the "water-leap."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See p. 4.





150. THE MOUTH OF SEYDIS-FJORD.

The present capital of the east, a village of scattered dwellings and traders' warehouses at the head of a deep and narrow loch, was settled by Bjólf the foster-brother of Lodmund. Its name, which being interpreted means "Herring-firth," tells us that the fisheries of which it is the centre, have always been an important industry on the coast. But it has no saga, and for us it is only the point of departure, where at midnight the anchor is weighed, the signal sounds, and we bid good-bye to Iceland.

And, southward bound, after these months of eager sight-seeing, we can at last reckon up what we have viewed, and what we have missed; asking ourselves—Was it worth while, our pilgrimage to the Saga-steeds?

We have missed, we must confess, nearly all that attracts the tourist. Iceland is not to be judged from our pages. We have not explored the crater of Hekla, nor the sulphur-mines of Krisuvik; we took only a distant peep of the Geysir and the basalt freaks of Stapi; into Surt's Cave we just glanced, and crossed in silence the vast rivers and waste reaches of the inland wilderness. None of the greatest waterfalls, or glaciers, or volcanoes come into

our tale,—nothing of the marvels of frost and fire that so many have been anxious to see, and so few have really penetrated and described.

Nor, again, have we gossiped as we might of the peasantry and their quaint, old-world life, so charming and picturesque, interesting alike to the antiquary and the artist. There is quite a new world for the painter in Iceland, in sensational landscape and in pastoral subjects; but all this was not in our programme.

Our one desire was to find the scenes of long ago, —to put a background to the figures of history: and this we have done. Though there are a few minor sagas left without illustration, we may claim to have carried out our enterprise. We have seen the homes of the heroes. They are no longer empty names to us, no longer formless dreams; and with their reality the great dramas of old start into life and action. It is as if a curtain had gone suddenly up: as if our eyes were opened, at last, to the glory of the North.



151. SEYDISFJORD AT NIGHT.

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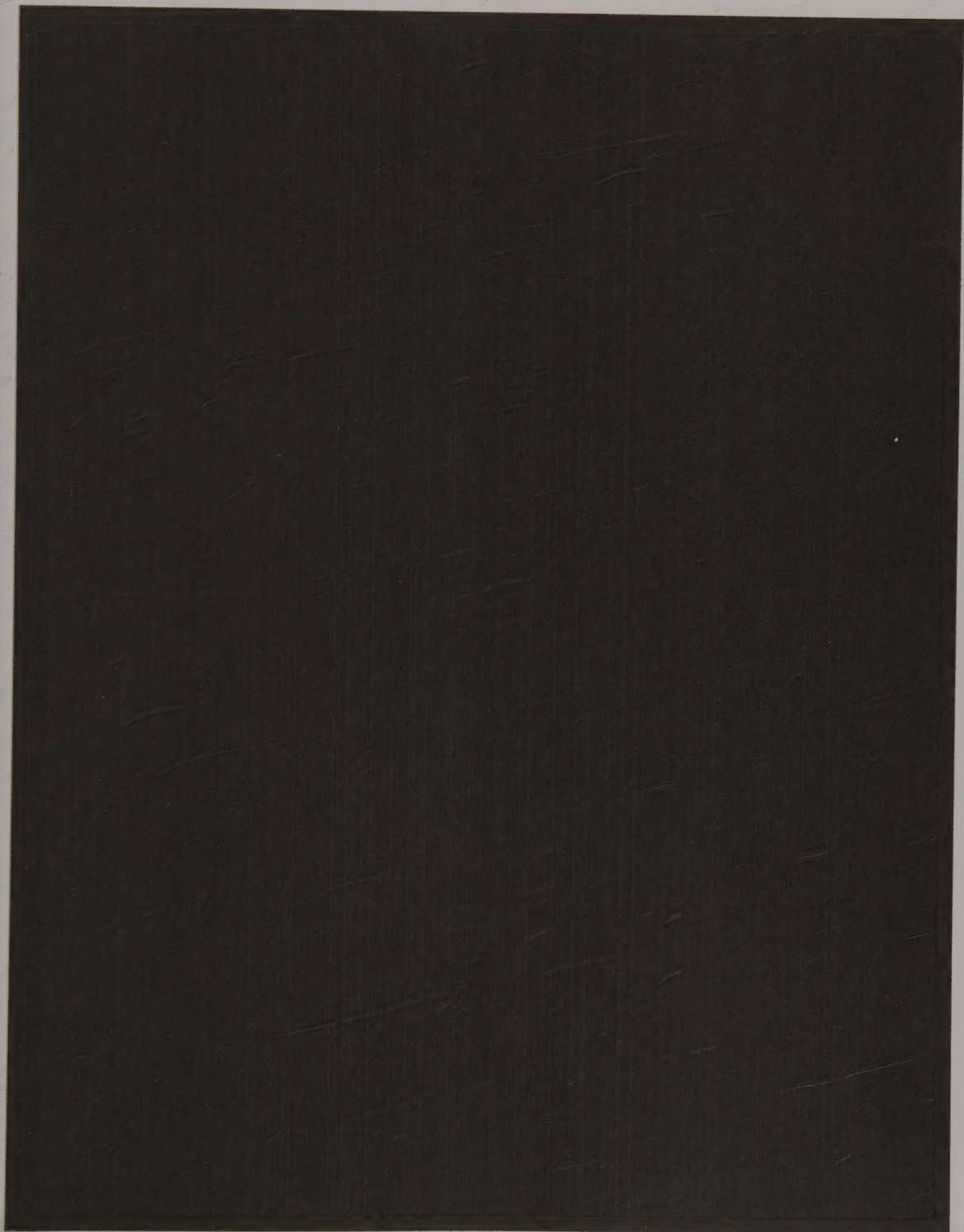




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